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GOLD-BUTTON SPORT:



OR, THE

MINER SHARPS Of Sulphur Bar.

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CHAPTER I.

A SLIGHT MISTAKE.

It was a bright May morning; the sun was high and all nature smiled.

Down the trail which led along the Virgin

THE MAN LOOKED UP IN AMAZEMENT TO FIND HIMSELF CONFRONTED BY THE SPORT.

River, in Southern Utah, came a young man, mounted upon an extremely sorry-looking brown broncho.

The appearance of the rider was a striking one, and would be certain to attract attention anywhere.

He was a young fellow, with a smooth face, apparently not over two-and-twenty, but with a resolute cast of features, every line of which showed strength and determination.

He had keen, dark-gray eyes, eyes only possessed by men who are born to be leaders of the multitude.

His dark brown hair, worn very long, fell in ringlets upon his shoulders.

He was oddly attired. Upon his lower limbs he wore the rough, woolen trousers common to the men of the section; but, instead of a coat, he was habited in a gaudy Mexican jacket, composed of black velveteen, ornamented with a myriad of golden bell buttons and little bits of gold lace.

His hat, too, was utterly unlike anything that any one would be apt to adopt.

It was black in color, wide in brim, high in crown, and, being very stiff, kept any position in which he chose to place it.

The rider's business would have been apparent to any of the old residents. He was a sport—a card sharp, who depended upon his wits for a living.

He had left Fort Cameron, on the Upper Virgin, two hours before.

He was now beginning to look about him for signs of the next town, which was the mining camp of Sulphur Bar, situated at the junction of Sulphur Creek with the Virgin River.

"I can't be more than a couple of miles from the camp," the horseman said, allowing the tired broncho to fall into a walk.

But he said or thought no more of the camp, for, at that moment, from around the corner of a giant boulder, sprang a huge, hairy ruffian, whose face you could hardly see on account of the hair which covered it, but, as the aforesaid hair was bright red in color, the man looked more comical than fierce.

His errand, however, was not of a comical nature, for in his hand he held a rusty revolver, which he leveled full at the breast of the man on the broncho.

"Pull up yer hoss! I am the new toll-collector on this road, so must trouble you to hop down from yer bag of bones and shell out yer wealth."

"Certainly!" responded the sport, pleasantly, as if this sort of thing was an every-day occurrence.

He dismounted and proceeded to put his hand in his pocket, and then, for the first time, the footpad noticed that he did not wear a weapon belted to his waist.

"Hello! hello; w'at does this yere mean? Whar' are yer popguns? And w'at are you a-doing, a sport to be a-traveling around the country without yer cheese-cutter?"

"I am playing in hard luck just now, my vermilion friend. For the last two weeks I have been at Fort Cameron trying to make an honest living in my usual style, but Dame Fortune didn't choose to give me a square deal; things didn't come my way, and as I was playing with a lot of the greatest sharps in the country—for what those officers at Fort Cameron don't know about card playing isn't worth knowing—I got regularly cleaned out before I knew it."

"I have a couple of dollars in my wallet, here, though, which you can have, although I want them very badly, indeed, to help me out to-night in Sulphur Bar, for, as I am a perfect stranger there, I cannot depend upon striking any friend for a loan."

"Goi durn ye'r measly skin to blazes! W'at do yer mean by playing any low-down trick like this on me?"

"I have a good mind to fill you as full of holes as a sieve. How do you s'pose I'm a-going to live, if every blamed pilgrim that comes along my road can only shell out two dollars? By gosh! if this hyer sort of thing kep' on it wouldn't be long before I could make more money by going around the country and exhibiting

myself as a living skeleton than by taking care of this yere road."

"I am sorry. No one can possibly regret my lack of cash more than myself, but these things will happen this way sometimes. You cannot expect to keno every round, and the man who does is a donkey."

"Oh, it's all very well for you to talk in that way, but I am in this world for money and not for fun, and yer can bet ye'r boots I'm going to git it, too!"

"Yer are giving this thing to me straight, ain't yer?" he exclaimed, abruptly, with a suspicious look. "Yer hain't got a lot of wealth hid away somewhar in ye'r clothes, hey?"

"Not much! I reckon that if I wasn't broke clean down to bedrock you wouldn't find me traveling about without any weapons."

"That is so—that is the truth, for yer would be crazy to do it."

"Wa—al! I s'pose I will have to take ye'r two dollars; so hand them over."

"Certainly!" responded the sport, proceeding to open his wallet.

But the footpad didn't get the two dollars.

He was now off his guard, which was exactly what the sport had been trying to accomplish.

The two men were about five feet apart. The sport bent slightly over his wallet, then he gave a tremendous spring, head foremost through the air, and the crown of his head struck the footpad in the chin with the force of a battering ram.

Over backward went the big, hairy fellow as suddenly as if he had been shot, his head striking the ground with a concussion which made him see a myriad of stars.

The sport promptly wrested the revolver from the footpad's hand and thrust it into the folds of the bright-colored silk sash which ornamented his waist.

Then he got astride of the road-agent's body and flourished an extremely muscular fist within an inch of his nose.

It took a few moments for the fallen man to recover from the shock, but as soon as he fully realized what had happened he stared up into the face of his captor.

"Durn my cats if this yere wasn't the meanest trick that I ever heered tell on."

"Oh, it doesn't agree with your idea of what is right and proper, then?"

"Not by a blamed sight! Yer took the meanest kind of an advantage of me. Durn me if I don't believe that yer hev' broken both my jaw and the back of my head, and if that is so, w'at's going to become of me, I'd like to know?"

"You shouldn't go into speculations where you expose yourself to such risks," the sport coolly replied.

"You can thank your lucky stars that things are as they are, for, if I had had my revolver I would have shot you so promptly when you first made your appearance that the odds are you never would have known what hurt you; but, as it is, you are going to get off light."

"I am going to bind you hand and foot, with a note explaining the circumstances of your capture, and leave you here by the roadside, while I go on to Sulphur Bar."

"There I will relate the particulars of this hold-up, and the marshal of the town can come and get you."

"Oh, come, now, I say! w'at is the use of yer playing any game of that kind? W'at good will it do yer to put me behind the bars? Yer have pretty near knocked the life out of me and yer ought to be satisfied."

"I made a big mistake, of course, in trying to hold up a sport like ye'rself, but I am a new hand at the business, and this is the first time I ever tried any game of the kind."

"I am a sport myself, though you wouldn't think it to look at the way I am fixed; but, ye see, I am way down to bedrock, and ain't got ary cent to my name."

"When I tried to hold yer up it was the last forlorn hope! Now, see hyer, sport, give me a chance for my life and I'll give

ye my word I'll never git mixed up in a game like this again!"

"Upon my word, it seems to me that you are playing in worse luck than I am, and as I never yet struck a man when he was down I won't strike you."

The sport rose to his feet, allowing the footpad to do likewise.

"I think I shall have to hold on to the revolver for a while, though, just as a measure of precaution, you understand," the sport remarked, with a sly twinkle in his eye.

"That is all right; I hain't got no objection; and now, sport, since you have shown ye'rself to be a clean, white man, mebber I'll be able to do something for yer. I know everybody in Sulphur Bar, and can post yer about them. So mebber I can git yer some valuable information."

"It is possible, and I am the kind of man who pays well for his services."

"Then we will go on together, and, joining our luck, perhaps it will alter things for us both."

CHAPTER II.

IN THE MINING CAMP.

When the sport went to mount his broncho he came to the conclusion that the poor beast was too tired to carry him.

"It would be a shame to ride the horse in this condition. It will be as much as he can do to get to the town himself."

"Yes, yer want to save the hoss, for he will do for a stake in Sulphur Bar—not much, of course, for about all he is good for is crows'-bait."

"I didn't pay anything for him; he was given to me at Fort Cameron; and as these bronchos are so deceptive, I made the mistake of thinking the beast was better than he is."

"Wa—al, I am considerable of a hoss-trader, and I reckon I can git five dollars out of somebody for him."

Then the two went down the trail.

"How far is Sulphur Bar?" the sport asked.

"A little less than two miles."

"Is it a booming camp?"

"You bet, and the best of the thing is, it is one of those camps whar' almost everybody is doing well."

"That is a good report."

"Yes, the big mines, with the machinery, running ten or twelve men, are turning out big paying ore; and the small concerns, run by the proprietors, are doing well, too."

"Besides, in the mountain gulches there are pockets and rich places whar' men with common, ordinary tools can make good days' wages, some as high as ten dollars."

"This is a very encouraging account, indeed, and in such a camp a man like myself ought to do well."

"By the way, sport, w'at is ye'r handle?" the big fellow asked abruptly.

"Mine is Sandy Jones."

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Jones," said the sport, in his courtly way, and he made the other an elaborate bow, which surprised the gaunt road-adventurer.

The big fellow ducked his head in awkward return of the salute.

"My name is Harry Gordon. I am a Californian born and bred. My father was a distinguished sport; his father was a man who could hold his own, in the sporting line, with anybody; so you see I come honestly by my occupation."

"My nickname, among my chums, is the Gold-Button Sport, on account of the way my jacket is trimmed."

Just then they came around the bend of the road and the town of Sulphur Bar was right before them.

"I will take yer down to the main hotel of the place and introduce yer to the boys. It is a right smart hotel called the Imperial House, and run by an honest Dutchman, Jake Hoffman by name."

"Thar' is only one fault about Jake—he wants the cash every time, and won't let a man hang him up, no matter if it is a fellow like myself, that he knows he is sure of getting his money out of when I git it."

"Ow, wow, wow, wow!"

A series of yells that would have done credit to a wild Indian, and then forth from a saloon just in the advance of where the two were came a red-faced, red-shirted, big, overgrown specimen of a miner.

He had his sleeves rolled up above the elbow, and danced out into the roadway, brandishing his arms like windmills.

"Here I am, Mickey McGinniss, the everlasting cock of the walk, wow, wow!"

"My name is Mickey McGinniss, d'ye mind; but I am no Irishman. There was some crooked work at the time I was baptized, and I got some other man's handle."

"But that ain't neither here nor there. I am the champion, and every stranger that comes to this camp has got to have a taste of my qualities. So peel off that 'ar' comical monkey jacket an' gin' me a chance to wade into yer."

"Yes, but see here; I have no quarrel with you, and I'm no prize fighter to indulge in a fisticuff match with every man I meet just for the fun of the thing."

"Then yer will hev' to crawfish! It is either fight or crawfish. If you hain't got the sand to stand up for a round or two and let me hammer yer, then yer will have to git right down on ye'r knees in the dust and admit that I am the best man you ever saw."

"Oh, come! come! a performance of this kind is altogether out of the question! I'm not going to kneel in the dust to you or any other man, and so, by Jove, since you insist upon a fight, I'll give you one."

"Aha! that's the kinder talk I like to hear, and I ain't had a chance at a sport with his long hair and his b'iled shirt for a dog's age."

"Peel off that jimerack and lemme hev' a chance to hammer yer so that ye'r own brother wouldn't know yer."

"Wait a bit! As I go through this life I propose to do things in a business-like way," the sport insisted.

McGinniss looked surprised.

"Now then, how much money do you dare to put up on yourself? This scrap will be a heap sight more interesting if it is for a small stake."

"Durn me if I ever heered of such a thing afore!" McGinniss declared; "still, I reckon it ain't a bad idea, for it would be considerable satisfaction to take some good, hard, solid ducats out of a man besides thrashing him within an inch of his life."

"Oh, yes; to my thinking it's a big improvement over the old style. How much will you put up?"

"I'll go yer ten dollars!" the big fellow declared.

"Make it twenty!"

"Nary time; ten is my limit."

"Well, how are we going to run this thing?—Marquis of Queensberry—"

"Markis of Queensberry be hanged!" McGinniss roared. "We'll have it the good old-fashioned rough and tumble; no let up until either one man or t'other has got enough."

"All right; that will suit me."

Then the sport took off his hat, removed his jacket, and squared off at his opponent.

By this time quite a crowd had gathered, attracted by the altercation.

The citizens were not surprised to see McGinniss attack the new-comer, for they were aware that, when he had a little liquor on board, he had a craze for tackling strangers.

The fighters faced each other, and, although the miner was the larger man, yet he was not much bigger when they were compared, side by side.

"Now, then, look out for your apple cart, for I'm going to smash yer!" McGinniss yelled, as he rushed at his antagonist.

It was the old idea; he was bigger than the other man, and was going to bear him right down by brute force.

But the sport was a scientific boxer, one of those who understand all the principles of the manly art of self-defense; so, as the big blusterer came at him, he received him with a straight right-hander, which, landing on McGinniss's chin, seemed to half knock his head off.

This effectually stopped the rush, and,

before he could recover from the effects of the stroke, he received a left-hand blow, which, alighting just over the heart, doubled him up like a jack-knife.

The crowd yelled; they had never seen any such work as this since the camp of Sulphur Bar was founded.

Then followed a third terrific stroke; the sport delivered a smash between the eyes, which sent McGinniss over on the flat of his back, the most astonished man that Utah had ever seen.

The bystanders fairly howled their delight, for this sort of show was exactly to their taste.

The sport was quick to improve the advantage which he had gained.

It was to be a rough and tumble fight, and, in such a contest, in the wild West, everything goes.

So the stranger in the town sprang forward and seated himself astride of the chest of the prostrate man, thus rendering him completely helpless.

McGinniss looked up at the brandished fist, which threatened to damage his frontispiece.

"Hol' on! hol' on! W'at in thunder do you mean by such here work as this?" the big tough sputtered. "Ain't you going to give me no show to fight at all? Why, I ain't had a chance to strike a blow!"

"McGinniss, when I go in to lick a man I propose to do it as quickly as possible. You are a whipped man; perhaps you don't know it, but after I pound you for a few minutes you may come to the conclusion that you don't stand any show in this fight."

"No show! By the everlasting hills, the only show I can see is to be hammered, and I reckon I ain't fool enough to stand that if I can git out of it."

"I am a licked man, and I'm not so big a fool as not to know it. The ten dollars is yours."

"All right!" and Gordon rose to his feet, when McGinniss slowly did the same.

After he got on his legs, he carefully surveyed the sport, and then shook his head.

"You are the biggest fraud of a man that I ever run across in my born days."

CHAPTER III.

THE SPORT SHOWS HIS QUALITY.

"I reckoned I could pick out a fighting man every time, but I never would have selected a dudelike chap such as you for a champion fighter."

"Ah, yes," remarked the sport, as he put on his hat and jacket, "but this is a world of deceptive appearances."

"Things are not always what they seem; Skimmed milk masquerades as cream."

"Mebbe it does; I ain't posted about milk, nohow; but I do know that ye'r the best man who ever struck this camp, and here's ye'r ten dollars."

"Much obliged. So long," and the sport, with Sandy, went on up to the hotel.

There Sandy introduced him to the landlord, and he made arrangements for a room, to which he repaired at once, followed by Sandy, who had come to consider himself as a sort of valet to the sport.

"Now, then, old man, I want you to take that broncho and see what you can get for him."

"Thanks to this fool miner with his crazy idea that he was a fighter, I have managed to secure a small stake, and if I can get a few more dollars to put to it, I will be able to go ahead to-night in tolerably good shape."

"Thar' is no disputing but what yer hev' made a mighty good beginning, and it really looks as if ye'r luck had changed."

"It certainly does have that appearance," the sport asserted.

"Oh, by the way, while you are voyaging about the camp, just keep your eyes open for any poker games that may be on to-night. Games, you understand, where good men will set in; no little two-cent gambler business, for there is no money, as a rule, in one sporting man attempting to skin another sporting man. It is the

outsider from whom the cash must come—the man who thinks he plays a better game of poker than he does, and when a man makes a mistake of this kind, he always has to pay for it."

"Sart'in! And thar's a heap of sich critters in the world," was Sandy's opinion, as he departed.

The sport then sought the landlord, Jake, and in the easy way peculiar to him he requested: "I want you to do me a favor."

"Vell, I don't know 'bout d'ot, und just at present I am a leedle short."

"Oh, I don't want to borrow any money. My revolver is out of kilter, and I want to get the loan of a weapon for to-night. It must be a good tool—safe for a man to trust his life to in an emergency."

"Oh, yas; d'ot vas all ri'dt," the Dutchman responded. "I vas glad to oblige you, for I haf a half a dozen revolvers. You understand, Mr. Gordon, I vas a very good-natured mans, and v'en a gustomer comes mit himself along, und says, 'How goes it, Jake, ole man? I vas proke; I haf a revolver; how much can you let me haf on dot? If I make me a strike, I vill take him up. If I haf to the town jump, you can sell it und get your money back, dot vay!'"

"Now, mine tear frien', Mr. Gordon, der's mighty few revolvers, d'ot I vill not go five tollars on."

"Jake, you are a man with a heart in your bosom, and it does me proud to have the honor of your acquaintance," and with a deal of politeness the sport shook hands with the Dutchman, who did not know exactly what to make of it. Still, he was decidedly pleased by the action.

Hoffman took the sport to the closet where he kept the revolvers.

There was a pair of nickle-plated weapons there, really beautiful tools, with all the modern improvements, which the sport greatly admired.

"You vas ri'dt, Mr. Gordon; d'ot vas de finest pair of revolvers d'ot I effer saw," the Dutchman averred.

"You can haf d'ose weapons for dwendy tollars if you should vant to puy dem."

"They are certainly cheap enough, and perhaps, in a few days, I can see my way clear to invest. Just now, one of these is the tool I would like to borrow."

"D'ot vas all ri'dt," and the Dutchman handed over the weapon. "Here vas blendy of cartridges, too. They often leaf d'ere cartridge-pelts mit de revolvers."

"Much obliged," and the sport helped himself to a liberal supply of the cartridges, after which he took a seat in the corner of the saloon.

During the day, in the average mining camp, there is no business done in the bar-rooms, so there were only a few loungers in the place.

The day passed slowly away.

Late in the afternoon Sandy Jones came in. He had succeeded in selling the broncho for five dollars, and brought the money to the sport.

"You must be a genius as a horse-trader."

"Oh, yes, yer can bet ye'r gizzard on that. If any man kin sell a hoss, I kin!"

"How are you fixed?" the sport inquired. "Don't you need a little of this cash?"

"No, thank yer; much obleeged to yer, all the same, but I hev' struck a streak of luck, heving run across an old pard of mine, Steve O'Brien."

"He has just come to the camp and got a cabin up on the hillside."

"There are two bunks, and he says I am welcome to share pot-luck with him until times change with me."

"You are fortunate."

"Thar' is going to be a poker game right here to-night in this hotel. The best men in the town are in it—the alcalde, the Express agent, the postmaster, and two or three more people who amount to something."

"Ah, yes! That is just the kind of a party I would be delighted to join. I reckon I will have to speak to that dear Dutchman, and get him to introduce me. I don't doubt that he can do the trick, for most of these private parties are usually

curious to test the qualities of every stranger or sharp who comes along."

"I reckon Jake kin work it for yer. So long," and Sandy departed.

The sport spoke to the landlord about the matter, and Jake did not think there would be any trouble in arranging it.

After supper the street of the camp began to liven up.

There was only one main street to the town, and that ran parallel with the river, and all the houses fronted on this stream.

The landlord introduced Gordon to the members of the poker party.

There were Maurice Littlefield, the alcalde of the town; Harry Lindley, the Express agent; Tom Mack, the postmaster; Moses Oppenheimer, the storekeeper, and Joe Whitcomb, a gentleman who described himself as a mining speculator on the lookout for a good investment.

Gordon had seen too much of life, and was too good a judge of men to be fooled by any such statement; he knew at once that Whitcomb was a professional gambler, and from the fact that he was masquerading as a business man, the sport judged that he was a wolf who would bear watching.

All of the party were glad to make the acquaintance of the sport, for all had heard of his victory over the big miner—a conquest that gives a man astonishing prestige in the mining camps.

A little after nine o'clock the poker party sat down.

It was really a gentleman's game—the way the members of the coterie expected to run it.

It was a twenty-five-cent ante with a ten-dollar limit, so it was possible for a player, if he was extra fortunate, to make a good stake without any individual gamester losing heavily.

From the beginning the sport kept his eye on Whitcomb.

As it happened, he sat by his side, so it was not possible for Whitcomb to do much of anything without Gordon's knowledge.

For a couple of hours the game proceeded without varying fortunes; no one could boast of great gains, and the losses individually were slight.

Oppenheimer had suffered more than anybody else, so when eleven o'clock came he concluded that he had got enough, cashed in his checks and departed.

The postmaster only lasted fifteen minutes more, but the rest concluded that they might as well keep on until midnight, as that was the usual time for going to bed.

Whitcomb had been greatly dissatisfied with the smallness of the stakes, and the limit, for an hour or so, and had done some grumbling.

"Now, gentlemen, as there is just a nice little party—four of us—suppose we change from this baby game to one worth playing. The quarter ante is all right, but let us fling the limit wide open," he suggested.

The alcalde and the Express agent meditated for a few moments, and, considering that only three-quarters of an hour was left for play, both concluded to go in for a little big play.

At it they went.

Although the sport had not been apparently particularly lucky, yet in reality he had succeeded in picking up quite a number of little stakes, and was a hundred dollars ahead of the game.

The first round did not amount to anything, but in the second all the players caught good hands, and therefore bet largely.

Two hundred dollars was on the table when the call came.

Whitcomb claimed the stake with four kings and an ace.

"You are a villainous cheat!" the sport cried.

CHAPTER IV.

MEETING THE WOLF.

This announcement astounded everybody, and all stared at the sport.

"What do you mean by such a statement?" Whitcomb demanded, his face dark with rage.

"Just what I say. You have no claim to this stake. That ace and two of the

kings you slipped into your lap the last round when it was your deal, and you have three cards there now which rightfully belong to your hand this time.

While the sport had been speaking Whitcomb had quietly put his hand under the table, seized the three cards, which he really did have there, and crumpled them into a little ball.

Then he sprang to his feet, apparently in a very indignant mood, cast his cards upon the table, and cried:

"There! that settles it! I will not have anything more to do with the game! Such an accusation lets me out immediately. Good-night, gentlemen!"

And he marched out of the room with his head high in the air.

"The pot is really yours, alcalde," the sport remarked, "for you had the best cards of all of us."

The alcalde had been the heaviest loser in the party, so he was decidedly pleased with this capture.

It lacked now but a quarter to twelve, and so the game came to an end.

The members of the party took a parting drink together, and then went to their various homes.

As the sport was proceeding up-stairs to his room he was intercepted in the entryway by the landlord, who, in the most mysterious manner, drew him into a dark corner.

"Mine tear frien', Mr. Gordon, let me told you a leedle somedings. I vas in der next room und overheard all d'ot fight about der two hundred tollars.

"You must keep your eyes skinned for d'at mans Whitcomb. If he vas not one bad eggs I do not want a cent. One day last week he was playing poker mit a tenderfoot. He von all der man's monish, und at der end d'ere was a fearful row, for der tenderfoot said d'at he vas a cheat.

"Dey went oud into der streed to fight it oud, und he shot dat poor tenderfeets man so quick as never vas."

"I will probably have trouble with him, but it's one of those things that will happen, for a man can't avoid it, do his best; but you can rest assured that I will be on my guard, so that he shall not take any unfair advantage of me."

Then they said good-night and parted.

In the solitude of his room Gordon counted his gains. He had one hundred and twenty-five dollars.

"That is a remarkably good commencement," he soliloquized. "I reckon luck has changed."

Then he went to bed and slept as sleeps the man without care, until early the next morning.

After breakfast he bought the pair of nickel-plated revolvers, much to Hoffman's satisfaction, for the landlord regarded the sport as an extremely good fellow, and therefore thought he ought to have the best of everything.

Gordon went forth to survey the town, and it was fully two hours before he got back to the hotel.

Whitcomb was in the saloon when Gordon entered, and Hoffman, who was behind the bar, was apprehensive that there might be trouble.

Whitcomb contented himself with scowling at the sport, and immediately quitted the saloon.

Hoffman came from behind the bar and whispered in the sport's ear:

"Mine tear frien', Mr. Gordon, d'ot mans means mischief. He has his revolvers fixed, und he has a big knife, too, hidden away under der coat."

"Much obliged for your warning, Jake. I will keep my eyes open."

Gordon took a seat in the saloon and commenced the perusal of a newspaper, but had not sat there for more than fifteen minutes, when a young miner made his appearance and came straight to the sport.

"Can I speak a few words with you outside?" he asked.

"Yes, I reckon so," and Gordon immediately laid aside his paper and followed the miner to the open air.

"Say, thar's a man up the street wants to see yer, an' he says for you to bring ye'r shooting-irons along, for he is going to wipe you off the earth."

"Ah, yes; the champion wiper, I suppose. Trot along back to him and tell him I'm coming large as life and twice as natural."

The miner looked kind of puzzled at this odd speech, but he ducked his head and hastened away, while the sport followed slowly after him.

About a quarter of a mile away, a little distance beyond the town, where the trail ran through the open country, no houses being near, the sport saw Whitcomb sitting on a boulder.

Gordon came carelessly on until within revolver range; then he paused.

Whitcomb understood the movement, so drew out his white handkerchief and waved it as a flag of truce.

Gordon nodded, and came on immediately.

There was another boulder, similar to the one upon which Whitcomb sat, and he pointed to it as the sport came up.

"Take a seat. I should like to have a chance to talk this matter over with you, if you are agreeable."

"I am agreeable," the sport replied, as he seated himself on the rock.

"Don't you consider that you jumped on me pretty roughly last night when I had a pot of two hundred dollars nicely won, and you upset the whole business?"

"Yes; but you didn't win the pot in the right way. We were sitting in a gentleman's game, and it wasn't the proper caper to ring in any cutthroat gambling tricks."

"Well, I am in the business for the money there is in it, and after I'd worked up a scheme like that, I consider that you acted in a very unprofessional manner to break the game up as you did."

"It is my rule, when I am playing with gentlemen, to play like a gentleman. If the players are a lot of cutthroat gamblers, each man ready to eat the other up, why, then everything goes, of course."

"Now, see here, why can't you be reasonable about this matter? This is a booming camp; we are the two leading sports in it, and we can skin the citizens out of their eye-teeth if we play our cards right."

"You don't understand the kind of sport I am. I don't do business in that way. I play a square game every time, and won't have anything to do with crooked work unless I am compelled to measure wits with a lot of wolves; then, naturally, I have to meet the men at their own game. But even then I don't like to do such work, and will not if I can possibly avoid it."

"Then you will not go in with me?"

"No; there is a homely old phrase which covers the ground: Let every tub stand on its own bottom."

"All right; but I think you will regret this before many days are over. You put a gross insult upon me last night, and, by rights, you and I ought to use our shooting-irons, but I am inclined to be a peaceable man, and if you don't trouble me in the future, why, I won't lay up anything against you on account of last night."

"Just as you please; suit yourself, and you'll suit me. I never go out of my way to trouble any man."

Whitcomb rose to his feet, evidently very much dissatisfied with the result of the interview, and Gordon also rose.

"Of course, you have placed me in a very unpleasant position," Whitcomb remarked. "But I shall get out of the scrape by declaring that it is not worth while for a man like myself to pay any attention to the words of a common sport."

"Hereafter I will try to keep away from you, and I hope you will do the same by me."

And Whitcomb marched off toward the camp.

Gordon watched him for a few moments, a smile of contempt curling his lip.

"That is one of the kind of chaps that gives sports bad names; but he is no true sport—he is a thief, pure and simple."

"The odds are a thousand to one that we will come together, and I'll do my best to avoid it, for if it comes to a shooting match the odds will be all in my favor, as I look at it."

CHAPTER V.

AN ARDENT WOOLER.

The sport then consulted a little silver watch which he drew from the inside pocket of his jacket.

"It is two hours to dinner, and I don't feel like going back and loafing around that hotel, so I reckon I'd better find a little nook among these evergreens where I'll be shielded from the sun and can indulge in a siesta."

It did not take the sport long to find a sheltered spot, which really seemed to invite a man to repose.

He had a couple of cigars in his pocket, and as he reclined at full length on the soft turf, he smoked with a great deal of enjoyment.

There was something lazy in the air, for before he came to the end of his first cigar the sport was sound asleep.

How long he slept he knew not, but he was abruptly aroused from his slumbers by the sound of voices, high in anger.

"If you think you can make a fool of me you never made a greater mistake in your life," cried a harsh male voice.

"I am not trying to make a fool of you," was the answer, in singularly sweet female tones.

"Oh, yes you are! I can see now that you don't care for me as you used to. There was a time when I seemed to be all in all to you, but now there are a dozen around you, and you smile upon each and every one as sweetly as you do upon me."

"But, you don't understand, Jack! I am a woman in public life—a singer in the concert hall, and it is necessary for me to keep on good terms with the men upon whom I depend for my money."

"Yes, I understand all about that, and I don't object to your being polite and agreeable to all of them; but I don't want you to neglect me."

"Oh, Jack, I wouldn't do that for the world. Just think what a good friend you've been to me."

"When father died, without leaving a penny behind him, remember how you came to my aid."

"You gave him decent, Christian burial, then told me that you would lend me money enough to look out for myself until I could find something to do."

"By accident it came to the knowledge of Paddy Flynn, who runs the concert hall, that I was a good singer, and so he made arrangements for me to perform in his establishment."

"That gave me a means of an honest livelihood, but I esteemed your kind offer all the same."

"I wish I could be sure that you regarded me with the same feelings now that you did then."

"You gave me a promise to become my wife, but stipulated to wait for a certain time out of respect for your father's memory."

"Now, I think I've waited long enough, and I want you to keep that promise, and marry me right off."

"Oh, Jack, father has only been dead two months, and it would not be proper for me to wed in so short a time."

"Florentine, I'm going to give you five minutes to decide about this matter," the man declared.

And the sport, to his amazement, heard the click of the cocking of a revolver.

"Hello, hello!" Gordon muttered to himself as he rose to a sitting posture.

"I reckon this fellow Jack means mischief."

"He is one of those crazy loons who had just as lief murder the woman he loves as not."

Then he rose noiselessly to his feet, stepped to the edge of the evergreens, and peeped through them.

It was a striking looking couple he beheld.

The girl was a beautiful blonde of two-and-twenty, with wondrous golden hair, peach-like complexion, and glorious, great blue eyes.

Her features were clear cut and really refined, while in figure she was perfection itself.

The man was a rather short, thick-set fellow, with dark face, a full black beard and hair of the same hue.

He was well dressed, and was apparently one of the representative men of the town.

He had his revolver out, and was threatening the girl with it, while she, seemingly much terrified, shrank from him, reclining against a tree-trunk.

"Yes, Florentine, I repeat, I am going to give you five minutes to settle this matter for good and all."

"I want you to get down on your bended knees and solemnly swear that you will marry me before this week is out. If you don't I will drive a ball through your brain!"

As a rule Harry Gordon believed in attending strictly to his own business, and rarely interfered in matters which did not intimately concern him; but on this occasion he thought it proper to interfere.

There was something about this Jack which gave him the opinion that he was an extremely bad egg.

"I reckon he's the kind of man that ought to be interfered with on general principles, anyway," Gordon concluded, as he stepped through the bushes.

The sport had his revolver in hand, the hammer up, and had the black-bearded man covered before the latter was aware of his presence.

"I hate to interfere," the sport said, in a polite way, "but, don't you think that you are going a little too far in this matter?"

"Oh, my Heavens! He is crazy!" the girl cried, "or else he would never act like this."

"Oh, not exactly crazy—only a crazy streak. Now, my dear sir, have the kindness to put up that weapon. This little shooting business isn't going to take place, you understand."

Jack La Mothe, for so the man was named, stared at the new-comer for a moment in impotent rage.

He had recognized him as the new sport who had come to the camp on the previous day and immediately made a reputation as a fighter, so was not anxious to try conclusions with him, particularly as the thing started in with all the advantages on the sport's side.

He sullenly uncocked his revolver, shoved it back in his holster, but exclaiming fiercely:

"This is no concern of yours, and you've no right to interfere!"

"That is nonsense," the other retorted. "You were threatening to murder this young lady. Do you suppose any man can stand by and listen to a threat of that kind without feeling called upon to interfere?"

"But, really, sir, I don't think he would harm me," the girl interposed. "We had a little trouble; he lost his temper, and that was all."

"Maybe so," the sport responded, rather incredulously; "but, as you know the man and I don't, you ought to be a better judge than I am."

"I regard your interference as entirely uncalled for," La Mothe exclaimed hotly. "And I can tell you that I am not the sort of man to stand that kind of thing. One of these days I shall call you to an account."

"That is all right," Gordon replied, phlegmatically. "I am used to being called upon to step up to the captain's office and settle, so little things of this kind do not trouble me at all."

"You made a bad break when you incurred my enmity," La Mothe blustered, "for I am one of the representative men of the town—a man who amounts to something, and I can tell you any one had better have my friendship than my enmity."

"Well, I reckon I will have to worry along with things as they are."

"Florentine, you are not afraid to walk back with me alone to the camp?" La Mothe demanded of the girl.

"Certainly not. I am much obliged to you, sir," she said to the sport.

"Don't mention it."

Then La Mothe and the girl departed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MARSHAL OF THE TOWN.

The sport watched the pair until they disappeared from view.

"Say, what is the matter with the air of this camp? Is there something peculiar about it which has the property of making everybody want to fight?"

"I have not been here many hours, yet have succeeded in getting two men to regard me in such a light that I don't doubt either one would be glad to wipe me out."

Gordon shook his head as though greatly puzzled by the circumstance.

As he reached the suburbs of the town he encountered Sandy Jones, and to him explained what had occurred, and asked for information concerning Jack La Mothe.

"The galoot runs a small store, but he don't bear the best of reputations. There has been talk 'bout him and a gang of hoss thieves, who hev' tha'r headquarters in the mountains 'bout forty miles north."

"I am not surprised at your information, for I knew he was a bad egg the very moment I looked at him."

"Besides his store he deals in hosses, an' has been hauled up with the round turn three or four times for having stolen hosses in his possession, but the cuss has always managed to squeeze out by proving that he bought the hoss and gave good value for him."

"But that is all in my eye, and Betty Martin. The thing was a fake, fixed up between him and the rest of the gang."

"A delightful sort of a party," the sport exclaimed; "but he's just the sort of fellow to keep one's eyes upon, for there is no telling when he may attempt to strike a blow in the dark."

Business was duller than ever that day in the saloon, for not a soul was in there with the exception of Jake, the landlord, when the sport entered, and both of them were half asleep when into the apartment strode a muscular, medium-sized man, with a fierce face and an aggressive air.

He was well dressed, wearing high cowboy riding boots, which came up over velveteen pantaloons. His woolen shirt was an expensive one, richly ornamented with silk.

A short-skirted black velveteen coat, and a cream-colored, wide-brimmed slouch hat completed his costume.

Marching up to the counter, he whacked his hand upon it with an energy that made the glasses dance.

"How are you, Jake, old man? You blamed Dutchman, you are still alive, I see, making money at the expense of good American citizens, when you ought to have been used to put an addition on to the graveyard long ago."

"Gimme some whisky!"

The landlord hurried to comply with the request, smiling at his customer affably.

"Here you vas, marshal; der best in der house."

The new-comer nearly filled the tumbler with the potent fluid and tossed it off at a single draught.

"Aha! that's the rankest p'ison that can be found in Utah!" the man ejaculated.

"Jake, you cussed old Dutch fraud, the citizens will take you out some day and string you up to a tall tree for selling sich bad whisky."

Then he faced about and surveyed the sport, without offering to pay for his drink, nor did the landlord seem to expect it, for he put away the bottle and glass and returned to his stool.

Gordon had seen so many men of this stamp that he was quick to detect who and what he was.

In the far Western mining camps, where scenes of disorder frequently occur, it is the custom to put in one of the worst men of the town as marshal to keep order, going on the principle of set a thief to catch a thief.

"How are ye?" the marshal said to the sport. "I reckon you are the new card sharp that came to the town yesterday. Your name is Gordon?"

"Correct; that is my handle."

"My name is Roberts, Black Bill Rob-

erts, and I am the marshal of this yere town. Jake here can tell you that I'm one of the squarest white men that ever shook a pair in the air.

"I run this camp, and you can bet ye'r life that there don't no outside cuss dare to come in and proclaim that he is a big chief while I am around.

"Then I keep the games in order, and take mighty good care that no gambling concern skins its patrons any more than it ought to."

"The town is fortunate in having such a man as yourself to look after its interests, and I am glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Marshal," Gordon said, with great politeness.

"Ah! that reminds me, I've got a little business matter to talk over with you," and Bill came to where the sport sat and took a chair by his side.

He dropped his voice to a confidential whisper.

"I suppose you understand that as marshal of this town I don't get salary enough to make me break my back carrying it around."

"No, I suppose not," the sport replied, decidedly displeased by this beginning, which seemed to suggest to him that something unpleasant was coming.

"Of course, if a man attends to his duties as marshal as they ought to be attended to, he won't have any time to go into outside speculations."

"I presume not."

"Now, I hit upon a little scheme. I look after all the games, always stand ready to afford the saloon protection in case any drunken fellows should come in and attempt to run the shebang."

"Yes, I see."

"And the saloons, each one of them, pony up a small sum a week as a reward for my services."

The sport nodded. He knew that this sort of thing was customary.

"And then, too, the men who make a business of gambling generally whack up with me—nothing to amount to anything, you understand, just five per cent, whenever they happen to make big winnings."

"If the thing don't pan out well, they don't pay anything."

The sport looked wise, but said nothing.

"I don't s'pose you'd have any objection to go into this little arrangement?"

"Yes, I have a most decided objection to come to any such terms."

"I don't share my gains with any man."

"It would be a big advantage to you to do it, though; just think how much help I could be to you if you got in any trouble."

"I have always been able to take pretty good care of myself, and I reckon this camp ain't going to throw me down so badly as to make it necessary to call upon outside parties for assistance."

"Oh, it's all right; you needn't go into the thing if you don't want to, of course, but I think you'll come to the conclusion before you've been in this camp long that you've made a mistake in not standing in with me."

"If I ain't for a man, I am generally ag'in' him."

"Now, understand; don't make any mistake; I don't say that I'm going out of my way a single hair's breadth to do you any damage."

"The time may come when things will be so fixed that Marshal Bill Roberts could do a man about your size a heap of good."

"If you were putting up all right I would jump at the chance to do it, but if there isn't any cash, then I walks by on the other side."

"We cannot trade, and that's all there is to it," the sport said, decidedly.

The marshal rose, evidently very much annoyed.

"You will find out that you have made the biggest kind of a mistake before you are ten days older."

Then he departed.

"What is he, Jake?" Gordon asked. "Has he got any sand, or is he all bluff and blow?"

"Vel, I tells you now d'ot marshal vas

a pretty bad mans. As long as he vas keep himself sober he vas not so bad, but ven he fills himself up mit der neck mit whisky und turns himself loose, as he calls it, d'en he vas a holy terror."

"Well, that's a pleasant prospect for me," the sport said, with a laugh. "The first time he goes on a rampage he will be apt to go for me."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTIC BAND.

It is night, with a new moon, which affords ample light.

At the upper end of the valley, high up on the hillside, is a solitary cabin.

No lights came from it, and yet it was the point to which a half a dozen people or more had gone or were going.

And, strange circumstance, each man halted upon the threshold, drew a small black mask from his pocket, and affixed it securely to his face.

Then he opened the door and passed into the house.

Inside the portal he found himself in a dark entry, in which was a single door.

At this door the applicant for admission rapped in a peculiar way.

"How much?" came the inquiry from the inside of the door.

"All you have got," the new-comer replied.

Then the door opened, admitting him into a small, square apartment.

This man, whose movements we have described, was the last to arrive.

And he took the one empty stool in the room.

There was no furniture to speak of in the apartment.

An arm-chair at the end, with a little desk before it, and three stools on each side of the arm-chair.

Six men, all masked, sat on the stools, and a woman, well proportioned, and apparently young and good-looking, although she was so closely veiled as to prevent a view of her face being taken, occupied the arm-chair.

After the last man took his seat, she rapped for order with a little ivory-mounted revolver.

All paid her earnest attention.

"Now, then, brothers, we are again assembled for business; has any one hit upon a scheme by means of which we can make a good stake?"

"I think I have," the man on her right volunteered, and with an author's privilege we will reveal the fact that this man was Jack La Mothe.

"That is cheering intelligence, Brother A," the woman responded; "suppose you explain."

"I will. About half a mile south of the town there is a mining property known as the Golden Elephant."

"There is something mysterious about this claim, for when it was first struck it was reported to be very rich, and the parties congratulated themselves upon having got hold of a small bonanza."

"Then she petered out, and, although the owners went to a great deal of expense in putting in new machinery, they couldn't make it pay, and everybody connected with the concern went broke."

"Yes, I am aware of the history of the mine," the woman observed.

"And since the original owners gave up there have been a dozen different parties who have tried their hands on it, and each and every one was cleaned out."

"The property has been in the hands of the law, too, there have been so many parties with so many claims."

"At first the claimants were disposed to make a hot fight, but as time went on and the mine seemed to be worthless, they got sick of throwing good money after bad."

"But somebody has been running the mine for the last three months," the woman said.

"Yes," La Mothe replied, "a fellow who got possession as receiver."

"This man is a very smart fellow; he has only employed a few men, tinkered away here and there, and at last has succeeded in striking good pay dirt."

"He has kept it quiet, intending to buy up the claims."

"I see; a smart business operation," the woman asserted.

"Now, then, this is the game which I think we can play."

"We must find somebody with a claim, buy it, and then 'jump' the mine."

"Once we are in possession of the property it will take years to get us out, unless they can raise men enough to whip us in a pitched battle."

"Ah, well, that's a game that two can play," the woman asserted.

"I reckon we can raise as many men as they can, and I think the odds will be big that our men will be by far the better fighters."

Then she looked around.

"Has any one else anything to suggest?" she asked.

"I think I have a little thing that may amount to something in time," the last man on the left of the woman promptly replied.

"Go ahead!" commanded the female chief.

"A new sharp struck the town yesterday—a man named Gordon, known as the Gold-Button Sport, who made big winnings on his first night."

"He's an extra good man, and it looks to me as if he was one of the chaps who will soon be going around with a large amount of money in his clothes."

"It is my idea that if this happens it will pay us well to hold him up."

"Yes, undoubtedly; and we must all keep our eyes upon him."

"Brother A, you go ahead with your scheme and report progress in three days."

"That is all. Good-night."

The masked men departed, one by one, leaving the woman in possession of the apartment.

"So Harry Gordon has at last found his way to the mining camp where I have taken up my quarters."

"At last I shall have an opportunity to wreak my vengeance upon him."

"He killed the only man I ever loved, and although I tried for vengeance in the old time without success, for the man seems to bear a charmed life, yet it will not prevent me from striking at him now."

The woman rose to her feet, removed her hat, veil and outward disguises, revealing a plump, well-formed girl of twenty-five.

Then, donning another hat and a coat, she went forth into the night.

She descended the hillside to the town, and made her way along the main street to Paddy Flynn's concert hall.

She entered with the air of one perfectly familiar with the premises.

And no wonder, for she was the principal performer.

Daisy Murdock she was called, and she was one of the best song and dance artists that had ever been down in that section of Utah.

"Aren't yer affther being a little late to-night, Daisy?" Paddy Flynn, the proprietor, asked.

"No; am I?"

"It's affther ten, and you are booked to go on at nine."

"Ah, yes; I see; my clock must have been way out of the way."

"But these little things will happen sometimes," and with a light laugh she passed through the concert hall to her dressing-room in the rear.

Although Paddy Flynn called his place a concert hall, yet it had but little claim to the title, for it was a saloon and gambling-room of the ordinary Western type.

In the rear of the apartment was a small stage, curtained in, and upon this three performers amused the patrons of the gaming-house.

Just after the girl entered the Gold-Button Sport strolled into the place.

There was no game going on this evening, so he was amusing himself by taking in the town.

He sauntered over to the faro table and watched the play.

The sport was recognized by almost everybody, and received any quantity of

friendly nods, which had the effect of making him feel quite at home.

At the extreme end of the bar stood Marshal Bill Roberts, conversing with a stoutly-built, ruffianly-looking man.

"You don't mean to say that you've got through up in the gulch?" the marshal asked.

"Yes, I am no man's slave. When the boss tried to walk over me I wouldn't have it. Then we had some words and I was obliged to pound him within an inch of his life."

"You always were a fighter, Dan."

"Yes, I generally hold my own, and now, marshal, I want you to do what you can for me."

"I am out of a job, ain't got much money, and am open to take anything."

Just then the marshal happened to turn and caught sight of Harry Gordon.

"Hello! there's that blamed sport!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, is he the fellow that knocked out McGinniss?"

"Yes, and he did it so easily that the camp has jumped to the conclusion that he is a perfect wonder in the fighting line."

"I'm not so sure of that. I never did have much opinion of that McGinniss as a fighter."

"He is a powerful, big fellow, and that kinder scares his men."

"I shouldn't be afraid to take him on, and I reckon this here sport wouldn't have an easy job in getting away with me."

The marshal was quick to jump at this opportunity.

"Dan, I will go yer twenty-five dollars, just for greens, that you can't whip this sport."

"I will go you, you bet ye'r life."

CHAPTER VIII.

MORE TROUBLE.

The marshal chuckled to himself at the ease with which he had got the miner to attack the sport.

"Mind you, Dan," he said, "there isn't a doubt in my mind but what you can get away with him, and, really, I am throwing away this twenty-five dollars."

"But then you need the money mighty bad, and it will a source of satisfaction to me to see the man soundly thrashed."

"Oh! have you come in contact with him, then?"

"Yes. I made him a certain business proposition. As marshal of the town, you know, I can be a heap of use to a sport."

"But he didn't see it, and when a man ain't willing to agree to my views I generally try to get a lick at him if I can."

"That is natural, but I reckon I can get you all the satisfaction that you want."

"We want to arrange the thing, you know, so that it won't appear like a put-up job," the marshal cautioned.

"Oh, yes, yes, I understand. I'll fix it so that it will seem to be the most natural thing in the world. And I suppose I'd better tackle him here before he gets out."

"Yes, I reckon so."

"Keep ye'r eyes on me."

Then the miner made his way to the faro table, where he took a position by the side of the sport, but with his back half turned to him.

He was looking behind him, as though expecting some one to follow, but after a moment wheeled around and banged into Gordon.

"Say! that was a mighty stupid thing for you to do!" the miner exclaimed, angrily.

"For me to do?" Gordon echoed, in amazement. "You are the one who did the moving."

"Don't you give me any back talk," the miner yelled, ferociously.

"I don't allow no living two-legged man to talk back to me, and if any galoot tries a game of that kind I will smash him so quick that he will never know what hit him."

"The devil's in the air; here's another man crazy for a fight," was the thought that flashed rapidly through the mind of Gordon.

But the sport was full of sand, and, though he did not admire this sort of thing, yet he always met it unflinchingly.

"I don't know you, or anything about you," the sport said, "but one thing is certain, and that is, you are not going to bulldoze me."

"Ain't yer going to apologize for running into me?"

"I didn't run into you, so no apology is necessary."

"Then it's fight," and the miner began to square off at the other.

"All right. I am your man."

But at this point Paddy Flynn, with a big revolver, put in an objection.

"I cannot be afther allowing fighting in here. Go outside, and there ye can fight all ye like."

"Come on, then," cried the miner; "come outside and I'll make a monkey out of yer."

"Maybe you will, and maybe you won't," the sport responded, as he followed the other through the doorway.

About everybody in the saloon trooped after, much to Mr. Flynn's disgust.

The moon was high in the heavens, so there was plenty of light.

The miner cast his hat upon the ground and rolled up his shirt sleeves.

Gordon removed his jacket and hat, and also rolled up the sleeves of the fancy white shirt which he wore.

"You are a regular dude, with ye'r b'iled shirt," the miner sneered.

"But inside of five minutes, I'll take a heap of the dude out of yer."

"Well, if fights are to be won by blowing, you are going to have everything your own way."

"Without any exception, you are the biggest blowhard that I ever met."

"Look out for me, I'm a coming!" the miner roared.

And then he rushed at his opponent.

Right and left he struck, with terrific force.

Terrible blows, which would have done a deal of damage if they had alighted.

But Gordon was by far too good a boxer, far superior to his antagonist, to allow the other to hit him.

He hopped back, then to the right, then to the left, with all the ease and grace of a dancing-master.

For fully a minute the miner pursued the agile sport without succeeding in catching him.

Then in disgust, and pretty well out of wind, he halted.

"Yer mean, miserable, dancing-jack! W'at do yer mean by acting in this way?"

"This is a fight and not a foot-race. Do you s'pose I'm going to chase you all over the camp?"

"It's plain that you don't know much about boxing, for I have been testing your qualities, so as to get a line as to what kind of a man you are."

"W'at do yer mean by this yere stuff?"

"Simply this. I have taken your measure, and now I am going for you."

Hardly had the words left Gordon's lips when he sprang forward with the fury of a tiger, and planted a straight right-hander between the eyes of the miner, which sent him over on his back immediately.

The crowd yelled with delight, for a prettier blow no man there had ever seen struck.

The miner was on his legs again at once.

He was furious with rage, and with murder in his heart, he rushed at his man.

Then followed another foot-race.

The sport seemed to delight in parrying or dodging the heavy blows of the other.

A couple of minutes, and the miner was almost breathless.

He was compelled to halt.

Then Gordon rushed at him, in his overwhelming way.

A couple of terrific blows, and again the miner went down, this time borne to the earth by a stroke in the chest, just over the heart which seemed for a moment to fairly knock the life out of him.

The crowd was wild with excitement, for no such fight as this had ever taken place before in Sulphur Bar.

This time it was fully three minutes before the miner was able to get on his legs again, and when he rose he was puffing and blowing like a man who had been doing a deal of hard work.

Gordon squared off at him, and the other, seeing only one chance for him to accomplish anything, made a sudden rush and clinched with him.

He had hopes to be able to do a little better as a wrestler than as a boxer.

But he was destined to be disappointed, for after a violent struggle of a few moments the sport succeeded in getting him in a position for a "cross-buttocks."

Then up into the air went the heels of the miner, and down he came on the flat of his back with a force that almost seemed to shake the earth.

Again the crowd yelled their delight.

And it was the universal opinion that the stranger sharp was a champion of champions.

For a few moments the fallen man seemed to be stunned.

And when the by-standers found that he made no movement to get up they hastened to his assistance.

They helped him to his feet, about as thoroughly a played-out man as that camp had ever seen.

"Bring me a chair, some of yer, won't yer, for I can't stand."

The chair was brought and the miner seated in it.

"I reckon this here thing beats my time," he muttered, between his long breaths.

"I gin' in! You are far too good a man for me!"

"Are you satisfied?" Gordon inquired.

"Yes, you'd better believe I am, and if I ain't I ought to be, for I have got the worst licking that ever a man took in this town."

"It certainly must be admitted that you haven't had much show for your money," the sport observed, with a peculiar smile on his lips, "but you were the man who brought on the thing. I am a peaceable fellow. I don't want to fight anybody, but I can't allow myself to be walked upon."

Then the sport resumed his hat and jacket and went down the street toward the hotel.

But he went not alone.

No, he had a bodyguard of twenty odd enthusiastic citizens, each one of whom talked at the same time, expressing his admiration for the skill which the other had displayed.

So, when he entered the hotel, to honest Jake's astonishment, he was accompanied by a regular mob.

There was a rush for the bar.

"Mr. Gordon, I want you to drink with me," came in a sort of chorus from the lips of about all of them.

And each man wildly beckoned the landlord.

Gordon surveyed the crowd for a moment; then he laughed and shook his head.

"Gentlemen, I don't really know what kind of a man you take me to be, but as there are about twenty of you here, if I should attempt to take one drink with each one of you, I should have a pretty extensive job on my hands."

"But I will tell you what I will do. I'll take one drink with the whole of you, and that will have to satisfy you."

As the crowd couldn't force the sport to do aught contrary to his wishes, they were obliged to accept his offer.

And while the liquor was being poured out the crowd voiced their opinion of the sport in the freest manner.

"You are the best man that ever came to this town, Mr. Gordon," cried one.

"You'd better believe it!" ejaculated another.

As the sport was a modest man he didn't enjoy this sort of thing, so he departed as soon as possible.

CHAPTER IX.

A DESPERATE DEED.

The sport had a caller after breakfast. The postmaster, Tom Mack, came with a couple of horses, for the purpose of showing the surrounding country to him.

They set off on their trip, from which they did not return until dinner time.

After the meal Gordon was standing by the bar, conversing with the landlord, when suddenly came the sharp report of a revolver.

The Dutchman jumped about a yard, and even the iron-nerved sport started.

"Mine gootness! V'at vos d'ot? It was up-stairs!" Jake cried.

"You had better go and see what the matter is as soon as possible," the sport suggested.

"Look out for the place, Moses," the landlord said to his assistant.

The two hurried up-stairs.

From one of the front apartments on the second floor came the sound of weeping and wailing.

The two men made a hasty entrance.

A sad scene met their eyes.

In the center of the room, flat on his back, staring up at the ceiling with sightless eyes, lay the body of a young, well-dressed man.

Blood was pouring from a wound in his forehead, and a revolver was just beyond the reach of his right hand.

Over the body knelt a handsome girl of twenty, a blonde, neatly clad in black, and she was weeping as if her heart would break.

"Mine gootness! v'at is der meaning of d'ot?" the Dutchman questioned.

"My brother has committed suicide. Rendered desperate by misfortune, he has taken his own life. It was done in a moment of despair, and before I could interfere to prevent it."

"Oh! d'is vas a bad piece of business," the host affirmed, "und, my tear young ladys, this is no place for you. Mr. Gordon, vill you haf' d'e kindness to put the lady in number nine, und tell mine vife all about id?"

"Certainly; glad to oblige," the sport replied.

She was reluctant to go, but Gordon had a persuasive way with him, and at last she yielded.

The landlord sent at once for the doctor, the coroner, and the undertaker, and inside of an hour the coroner's inquest was on.

Sulphur Bar had a speedy way of dealing with such cases.

The pair were brother and sister, Wilbur and Frances Underwood by name.

They had arrived in Sulphur Bar that morning, coming with the expectation of being put in possession of the Golden Elephant property; but the young man found that, in place of holding the fee simple of the mine which he supposed he had purchased, he only possessed one of the disputed claims, which had been in the hands of the law so long.

He was almost penniless, for he had calculated upon stepping into a good business as soon as he arrived at Sulphur Bar.

The shock of the discovery crazed young Underwood for the time being, and in his madness he rushed heedlessly into another world.

The coroner's jury had no difficulty in finding a proper verdict, and late that afternoon the remains of the unfortunate man were consigned to mother earth.

The sister had borne up well under the trying circumstances, and Mrs. Hoffman remarked to her husband that she was a very plucky little woman.

Just before supper Jack La Mothe called at the hotel and craved the favor of an interview with Miss Underwood.

The lady went to the parlor and the landlord escorted the visitor to that apartment.

The sport was in the saloon and overheard the request for the interview.

"Now, then, what is that fellow up to? It is none of my business, of course, but for once in my life I am curious, and I would like to get on to the game."

"The girl is a stranger in the town, so of course it is not possible that he can have any business with her."

"Hold on, though! I forgot about the mine. She has an interest in it, now that her brother is dead, and the chances are big that this snake is going in to rob her of her property."

Gordon sprang to his feet, a trifle excited.

"If this is the truth, it would be a really outrageous performance."

Then he meditated over the matter for a few moments.

"As a rule, I keep out of all affairs of this kind, having all I can do to attend to my own business, but I reckon I'll have to make an exception this time; this girl shall not be robbed while I am in the camp."

The call to supper interrupted the current of the sport's thoughts, and when he came out from the meal the landlord beckoned to him in a mysterious manner and whispered:

"You go up-stairs und make some talk mit mine vife."

"Certainly."

Never had a man come into the hotel to whom the landlord had taken such a fancy as to the sport, and he had introduced Gordon to his better half the second day of his sojourn—a privilege he rarely extended to new customers.

Hoffman conducted the sport to his private apartment.

Mrs. Hoffman was a plump little German woman, but, as she had been many years in this country, she spoke English as fluently as a native.

After the caller was seated Mrs. Hoffman began.

"Mr. Gordon, I hope you will pardon me for troubling you about a matter which really does not concern you at all, but Jake and I talked the affair over, and, as far as we can see, there is nobody else around who can do anything with the matter."

"Ah, yes, I understand. Since the job suits me I ought to take it, no matter whether it is any concern of mine or not."

"It concerns this unfortunate girl, thrown so suddenly helpless upon the world," explained the matron.

"You mean Miss Underwood?" the sport asked.

"Yes; she has a claim to this Golden Elephant mining property, and, judging from her statement, her claim is about as good as any of them if there was only somebody to back it up."

"As a rule, when it comes to a fight over a mine the backing is even more important than the claim," the sport observed, shrewdly.

"Now, the main reason, Mr. Gordon, why I have gone out of my way to speak to you of this is that I fear a gang of swindlers have marked her for their prey."

"A man named Jack La Mothe, who does not bear the best of reputations, came to see her this afternoon, saying that he was the agent of a syndicate which wanted to buy her interest in the Golden Elephant property."

"I am acquainted with this Jack La Mothe, and am aware that he is a man who will bear a good deal of watching."

"Of course, the girl was taken completely by surprise, and she has been so overcome by her brother's death that she was not prepared to pay much attention to business matters."

"This she explained to the man, but he was persistent, and told her that the way business matters were driven ahead in towns like Sulphur Bar did not leave much room for ceremony."

"The syndicate was prepared to pay her a good price for the property, but she must make up her mind in a day as to just how much she wanted."

"Although the girl was stunned by her great sorrow, she had sense enough not to give him a definite answer."

"In fact, she could not, for she had no more idea of what it is worth than if it were situated in the moon."

"In my opinion, this man will not deal fairly with her," the sport affirmed. "He is a wolf, pure and simple, going about seeking whom he may devour."

"Will you not undertake her cause, Mr. Gordon?" the hostess asked, imploringly.

"Yes, I will!" responded the sport, impulsively, "and she shall not be robbed while I'm around."

CHAPTER X.

AFTER INFORMATION.

Miss Underwood, acting on the advice of her newly-made friends, the honest Dutchman and his wife, declined to sell her claim to the Golden Elephant property to the syndicate represented by Jack La Mothe, whereat that worthy retreated from the hotel greatly enraged, for, in truth, he had calculated upon the girl's ignorance to secure the claim for a very small sum of money.

Meanwhile Harry Gordon proceeded to examine into the Golden Elephant matter.

First, he set Sandy at work, explaining to him that he thought of taking an interest in the claim.

He instructed him to get all the particulars possible in regard to the property.

"I can easily do that, by pretending I want to get a job there. If they take me on I'll be all hunky; if they don't, then I'll get a chance to talk to the workmen, and you can depend upon it that I'll find out everything worth knowing."

The sport took an early opportunity for a visit of inspection to the neighborhood in which the Golden Elephant mine was situated.

It was about two miles from the camp, and located in a little valley, through which ran a streamlet, making its way from the mountains to the Virgin River.

The sport went up the gulch to the mine itself, and there had a conversation with the man in charge—a middle-aged gentleman, named Robert Manchester, a very pleasant, well-informed person.

From him Gordon received a full history of the many vicissitudes of the property.

"I am only a receiver," Manchester explained, "put in by the court to see that the property is taken proper care of until the title is decided upon."

"Under the circumstances, of course, I have not attempted to do much work—only to keep things running, and see that the more valuable machinery did not suffer."

"But it is my opinion that the mine could be made to pay if it was run in a proper manner."

"Things sometimes turn out in that way. A mine which has ruined nine men will, once in a while, make the fortune of the tenth," the sport said, as he departed.

On his way back to the hotel Gordon meditated upon the situation.

"As far as I can see, nothing can be done until the lawsuit is settled," he observed. "If the law decides that she has any claim, why I will do my best to help her get it."

The homeward trail ran through a broken country, covered with evergreens, dwarf oaks and scrub pines, and just as Gordon uttered the last word of the sentence a sharp report of a revolver rang out upon the clear, still air, and down went the sport, all in a heap, with a groan, while out of a clump of evergreens sprang a dark-bearded, evil-faced ruffian.

He was poorly dressed, almost in rags. In his hand he held a revolver, and a grin of triumph was on his ugly face.

"I knew I could do the trick, although it was a long shot, but I reckon there ain't many better men around with a revolver than I am."

Reaching the side of the prostrate man, he muttered:

"Let me see. I will have to carry some token that I have done the trick, according to the agreement. How would it do to cut off half a dozen of these pretty gold buttons? It don't seem to me that I could have anything better."

Then he put his pistol in its holster, drew his bowie-knife, and knelt by the side of the sport, but before he could put his hand on a button an astonishing transformation was wrought.

Gordon made a spring for his throat and bore him over backward, the shock forcing the knife from his hand, and at the same time the sport plucked the revolver from the belt and cast it away.

Never was a man taken more completely by surprise, for now he was a helpless

prisoner, held to the earth beneath the strong knee of the sport.

"Blazes!" growled the man, in supreme disgust. "I reckon that yer ain't hurted, arter all."

"You are right. I am not. As you observed, it was a long shot, and I can tell you that it would take a revolver champion to hit his man at such a distance. As you are not a champion shot, your bullet went wide of the mark."

"Yes, blame the luck!" the ruffian growled. "I don't see how I could possibly make so bad a job of it; but, by gol! you went down as if you had been plugged right through the heart."

"Yes, it was my little game to have the thing look like that. I wanted to entice you within my reach. It was my desire to make a prisoner of you, and then force a confession."

"You won't git no confession out of me," the ruffian averred, sulkily.

"Now, don't go to making any boasts, for you cannot make them good. You are here, helpless, in my power; you have attempted my life, and so I am perfectly justified in taking yours."

Then from a secret pocket in his waistcoat the sport plucked an eight-inch bowie-knife, which he waved before the eyes of the disgusted tough.

"Now, then, do as I say, or with one blow I will drive this weapon up to its hilt in your neck and speedily send your soul to another world to answer there for its owner's crimes."

The prisoner took one look up into the resolute eyes of his captor, and then weakened.

"Hol' on! For Heaven's sake don't be in a hurry," he gasped.

"Will you give me the information I desire?"

"Sartin! bet ye'r boots! do yer s'pose I'm an idgit, to throw my life away for nothing?"

"You are a wise man to comply with my demand. Now, then, what is the meaning of this thing? As you are a stranger to me, there certainly is no reason why you should attempt my life, so, of course, some one must have set you on. Make a clean breast of it and I will let you go, otherwise I'll use the knife."

"That's a bargain," the ruffian exclaimed, cheerfully, and then proceeded at once to his confession.

"Wal, I hain't got much to tell, and I reckon yer won't gain much information out of it. You may be able to pick up a clew, though, which will put yer on the right track."

"That is my idea; so go ahead."

"I am a stranger in this camp," the man explained; "only arrived last night. I didn't bring with me wealth enough to astonish anybody in Sulphur Bar; in fact, I was pretty near busted when I got in."

"I hoofed it all the way down the river, so it was after nine when I arrived, and, being a stranger, I went into the first good-looking saloon I saw, in order to find out how things were running."

"It was Paddy Flynn's concert hall that I struck—an angel who put up the drinks like a major. Not only that, but he said if I came round in the morning he would git me a job."

"You were singularly fortunate," the sport observed, dryly.

"I reckoned so. I came out of Flynn's at twelve o'clock, when the concert hall shut up. On the outside a little man, not much more'n a kid, axed me if I wanted a job. 'Yes,' sed I. 'Are you particular what you do as long as yer git mighty well paid for it?' 'Not a mite,' says I."

"Then he explained how he wanted a man named Gordon wiped out. Said he'd give twenty-five dollars for the job—ten in advance, and fifteen when the trick was worked, and that's all thar' is to the thing."

"I don't know the man, nor anything about him, except I reckon he is a mighty big foe of yours."

"When are you to see the party to get the fifteen dollars?"

"To-night, outside of Paddy Flynn's, at eleven o'clock."

The sport had watched the tough narrowly while he was speaking, eager to detect signs of treachery, but was satisfied that he had spoken the truth in what he related; so, to keep his promise, Gordon released the man and rose to his feet.

"You are free to depart," the sport said, as he did so.

"Kin I git my weapons?"

"Certainly; I don't want them, and a man of your stamp would be helpless without them."

The ruffian now arose from the ground, secured his knife and revolver, and slouched away down the trail.

"That fellow is a human wolf, and when one like him is killed the world is better off."

CHAPTER XI.

GETTING AT THE TRUTH.

Gordon watched the tramp until he disappeared around the bend in the trail, then he followed slowly after, keeping a wary lookout ahead, lest the tough should make another attempt upon his life.

Gordon, happening to glance to his right in the direction of the foothills, thought he saw Sandy Jones making his way to the main trail.

The sport's face lighted up, for he had taken a great liking to Sandy, although he knew the man was one of the biggest cowards that ever lived, but he was shrewd and faithful, and the sport felt sure that what he said could be relied upon.

Soon Sandy came up. He had ascertained all the particulars in regard to the Golden Elephant property, but nothing beyond what Gordon already knew, with the exception that the ore which was now being turned out was a great deal richer than the receiver was willing to admit.

To Sandy the sport explained the peculiar episode through which he had just passed, whereat the miner was astonished.

"Why, I didn't reckon yer hed a foe in the town so anxious ter take ye'r life as all that."

"Neither did I. It was a complete surprise party to me; and although I captured the rogue I wasn't able to get much information out of him."

"The thing seems to center about Paddy Flynn's concert hall," Sandy observed.

"Yes, and I haven't had any trouble there except with that big miner whom I knocked out."

"He wouldn't try a game of this kind, for he's not a man of that sort," Sandy declared, positively.

"That is my idea. A man of his stamp might attempt to kill me himself in a tussle, but he certainly would never go to the trouble of hiring any one else to do it."

"Well, I reckon the only way yer kin git any information about the thing is for yer to go to Paddy Flynn's and take a look around. Mebbe you might see somebody thar' whose face would give yer a clew."

"Not a bad idea, and I'll try it. Did you notice the peculiar description which the man gave of the party that hired him—a little fellow, like a kid?"

"Oh, yes; I tumbled to that right off. Thet 'pears as if it were a woman in man's clothes."

"Yes, it certainly looks like it."

By this time the hotel was reached.

"Come down to-night after supper, and we'll try our luck in the detective line," Gordon requested. Then the two separated.

In the saloon Gordon found a man waiting to see him—a foxy-looking individual, with features that suggested that he came from Israel's ancient race.

His clothes were rather the worse for wear, but he had such a bright, sharp look that no one would have suspected him to be a man in need of money.

He greeted the sport in the most effusive manner.

"My dear Mr. Gordon," he exclaimed, as he shook hands with him warmly. "I am truly delighted to make your acquaintance. Will you have a drink with me?"

"I don't mind a glass of ale."

Gordon, like all first-class sports, was a temperate man.

"My name is Levy—Moses Levy," the other explained, as he led the way to the counter.

"Two glasses of ale, Jake," he ordered.

"I happened to be in the street on the afternoon when you had the little discussion with Mickey McGinniss, and I was amazed by the ease with which you handled him."

"Yes, McGinniss was an easy mark," Gordon observed, as he sipped his ale.

"Then, too, I was in Paddy Flynn's when you had it out with Dan Black. I know Dan, and I know that he's a mighty good man."

"Yes, I do not doubt that he could hold his own with any ordinary individual."

"But he didn't stand any chance with you."

By this time they had finished their ale and Levy drew the sport off into the corner, where the pair took chairs.

"Now, my dear Mr. Gordon, the idea of a gigantic speculation has come into my mind. If you and I go in together we can make a barrel of money."

Gordon looked a little incredulous.

"A few words will explain. I am a speculator, used to going into all sorts of enterprises, and, as a rule, they usually turn out extremely well."

"Now, then, you possess a most wonderful talent as a boxer. I never saw any one who could hold a candle to you, and I don't believe there is a man in this town, big or little, who could get away with you."

"Oh, I don't know about that," the sport demurred. "There are a great many men in this camp, and some Samson may be among them without any one knowing it."

"I'd be willing to risk it. Now, then, this is my scheme:

"Although you are a champion in the boxing line, yet no one would take you to be to look at you, and there's where the monkey part of the game comes in."

"In every camp there is one man who is regarded by the rest as the champion, and his friends are willing to back him with their last dollar."

"Now, we'll take in these camps, one by one. You can whip the champions, and we'll gather in the ducats by the bucketful."

"Not much," responded the sport, in the most decided manner. "I wouldn't go into a game of this kind if there was a million in it. I am no prize-fighter, and I never have anything to do with a fight if I can possibly help it."

"I cannot allow people to walk over me, though, and if it is either submit to be kicked or fight, I will fight every time."

"Oh, yes, that's correct, of course," said the other, very much disappointed at the prompt rejection of his offer; "but, my dear sir, I was led into the error of thinking that boxing was a sort of a trade of yours on account of the number of fights you have had during the short time you have been in this camp."

"The number of fights—yes," the sport exclaimed, with an air which showed that he was greatly annoyed; "the very deuce seems to have been in the air ever since I struck this camp. I am a quiet man. I always avoid trouble, but on these occasions it was utterly impossible for me to do so."

"Yes, yes, I see; I am sorry you can't see your way clear to go into this little scheme. Oh, what a lot of money we could have made!"

Then he invited the sport to another glass of ale, which Gordon declined, and the speculator departed.

"Vat mit you did d'at man vant?" the landlord asked, as the sport crossed the saloon on his way to his up-stairs apartment.

Gordon explained the errand of the other.

"It vas a big idea," the host admitted; "but, mine gootness, you could not do anything mit d'ot mans, for if you succeeded in making two or three thousand tollars he would, some dark night, run off mit all der cash. D'ot ish der game which he has vorked two or three times before."

"Well, as long as I'm not going to have anything to do with him, it doesn't mat-

ter whether he is a rascal or an honest man."

The sport passed up-stairs to his room, where he took a nap until supper-time came.

After the evening repast Gordon lit a cigar and sat outside on the porch, but soon was joined by Sandy Jones.

Gordon looked at Sandy in astonishment, for he had made a radical change in his appearance. His hair and whiskers had been trimmed, so he could be no longer termed a hairy man. He had on a new pair of boots and a new hat.

"Hello, hello!" the sport exclaimed. "You must have struck a good stake somewhere."

"You bet I did—twenty-five dollars!" Sandy responded, with a grin.

"I was up to the Big Injin mine last night, and a cuss thar' thought he could play checkers. Now, sport, I ain't boasting a bit when I say I am as good a checker player as can be scored up in a day's journey in a civilized community, whar' they know what checkers is."

"Well, this galoot thought he knew it all, and so, by handling the thing carefully, and not allowing the man to see that he was no match for me, I got twenty-five dollars out of him before he concluded it was time for him to quit."

"It was a lucky find for you."

"Say, sport, 'bout this yere visit to-night to Paddy Flynn's shebang?"

"What of it?"

"I put in some time to-day in and around that thar' place, and although I wasn't able to get hold on anything to amount to anything, yet I am satisfied that when we go there we go into an enemy's territory. So I reckoned we'd better hev' the support of a small army at our back."

Gordon looked surprised.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE CONCERT HALL.

"Yes, siree, a small army!"

The sport laughed.

"Why, surely, Sandy, you don't expect we're going down there to fight a pitched battle?"

"Oh, no, it's not quite so bad as all that, but I'm satisfied there's something about the air of that place which makes it unwholesome for you."

"Now, then, suppose the two of us go there. You are all right as a fighter, of course, but anybody that knows anything about me understands that when it comes to a scrap I am generally among the missing."

"My idee is that the parties at Flynn's who have it in for yer won't be apt to gin' yer much chance fer ye'r life—a crowd jump on yer so that yer won't hev' no show."

"Under such conditions I would have a hard time of it, you think?"

"That is jest what I am calculating; so when I got the thing through my noddle I went in to see if I couldn't even the thing up."

"The notion was a good one," the sport remarked, approvingly; "if you have got to have trouble, try to start in with the advantages on your side."

"The idee of the army came to me, and, as it happens, I am so situated that I kin git any quantity of galoots, good fighting men, who will be glad to lend me a helping hand."

"That is good."

"You see, sport, I was one of the founders of this yere camp, and the reason why I ain't well fixed now is because I am one of those happy-go-lucky fellows who puts in more time in attending to his neighbors' business than to his own."

"I think you are correct in your estimate of your character, and that is the reason why you haven't got along."

"You bet! If a man was sick in camp I allers volunteered to take care of him, and although that kind of good Samaritan business may pay hereafter, I'll be blessed ef it does now."

"That is a melancholy truth."

"But that sort of thing has made me solid with the camp, though, and I don't believe thar's anybody in it who kin git

the boys to do half as much fer 'em as I kin."

Gordon nodded assent.

"So it warn't no trouble for me to raise the army. I jest went to ten good men, one by one, explained that we were going to drop into Paddy Flynn's concert hall to-night at nine o'clock, and as I had a kind of a sort of an idee that thar' might be trouble, they would be conferring a mighty big favor on me if they could find it convenient to be in the saloon at that time, ready to take a hand in the fun. Each and every man said he would be glad to oblige me, and I might depend upon his being on hand."

"Well, with ten men at our back, we ought to be able to hold our own easily enough," the sport remarked.

The two sat on the porch and smoked, and chatted until nine o'clock; then they departed for Paddy Flynn's, and once there, joined the throng inside. Paddy Flynn took pains to come from behind the counter to shake hands with the sport and express his pleasure in beholding him in his establishment.

The tone of the Irishman was a genuine one, too; he meant what he said. Gordon was too good a judge of human nature not to detect this, so it was apparent to him that if he had foes in the concert hall the boss of the place was not among them.

"Wouldn't ye loike to be afther trying a little faro, Mr. Gordon?" the Irishman asked. "We run a square game here, and every man can be afther depending upon getting the worth of his money."

"Yes, I rather think I will try a little flyer at fao, to pass the time away," the sport assented; "but I'm no faro player, you understand, Mr. Flynn. I make no pretensions to being an expert or a high flyer, who goes around trying to break faro banks."

"Yis, I comprehend; ye jest play a nice quiet little game for your own amusement."

Then the landlord was called away, and the pair proceeded to the faro table, where they helped themselves to a couple of chairs and Gordon began to play.

In spite of his disclaimer, no man knew any more about the game of faro than Harry Gordon—understood it from beginning to end—knew when the odds were greatest against the player, and when the bank stood the least chance.

Of course, in all games of this kind a deal depends on luck, and if a man does not have a fair run of luck no skill or trickery will avail him.

As it happened, on this particular night, luck was running slightly against the bank and most of the players were winning.

The sport kept on until eleven o'clock. By that time he was a hundred ahead, and being satisfied with that, he cashed in his checks.

As he rose from his seat he was confronted by a burly ruffian, who exclaimed:

"Going to play the baby act and skin out for fear you'll lose what you've won?"

The promptness with which Gordon's right hand shot out was astounding.

The fist landed full upon the colossal nose of the ruffian, and sent him reeling across the room; only the interference of the wall saved him from falling.

This thing was so sudden that all in the saloon gaped with amazement.

Then there came a yell of rage from five rough-looking fellows, counterparts of the first ugly man, and they at once made a simultaneous rush upon Gordon, but the "army" was on hand.

Sandy's fighting men grabbed them, cuffed them, choked them, and finally all six were booted through the door in the most vigorous manner.

The work was done in an astonishingly quick period of time, and Paddy Flynn, hopping about with his big revolver, terribly anxious for the safety of his property, got no chance to interfere.

"Well, this is about the most astonishing thing that ever happened to me," the sport declared. "What the deuce made these six men, all strangers, attack me in this ferocious way?"

"Upon me wurd, Misther Gordon, I don't know anything about it. The min

are all strangers to me. I never was afther seeing one of thim in me place before."

"It certainly was a carefully planned game. The men were here in the saloon for the purpose of attacking me, and they took advantage of the first opportunity they could make."

"Oh, yis; nary the taste of a lie in that; but the game didn't wurk, though; never did I see six min so nately beaten."

Gordon happened to glance around, and caught sight of Jack La Mothe scowling at him a couple of yards away.

"Is this your work, Jack La Mothe?" Gordon demanded, angrily.

All eyes were now directed upon the pair.

La Mothe was bothered at being thus brought to book in presence of everybody, and hesitated.

"Oh, come! Speak out, man! Don't hesitate! Don't attempt to crawfish. Speak the truth and shame the devil."

"I don't know anything about it!" La Mothe declared, sullenly. "Why should I seek your life? What reason have I to desire your death?"

"None whatever, that I know of, except that we had a little difficulty out on the hillside the other day, and you were pleased to make some threats," Gordon responded.

"Yes, I know I did," La Mothe asserted, frankly. "I was angry at the time, and, like most angry men, I made a donkey of myself, but I can tell you right now, in presence of all this roomful of people, that if you don't die until you die through acts of agents of mine, then you will live forever."

"Your statement is certainly a satisfactory one," the sport assented. "I believe it to be true, for there is no reason why you should seek my life."

Now, happening to glance toward the stage, the sport saw the three performers who were grouped there, watching the scene going on in front.

There was the old negro comedian who played the banjo and told the funny stories to make the audience laugh; Florentine French, the balladist, and Daisy Murdoch, the serio-comic and song and dance.

Gordon caught a good view of Murdoch's face, and immediately a remembrance shot across his mind.

"Hello! there is a face I've seen before, and under troublous circumstances," he muttered.

"This is a matter which will bear looking into. Oh, have you got a variety show here? I reckon I'll have to take it in," and, Sandy and the "army" following, all marched down and helped themselves to front seats.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FIGHT IN THE NIGHT.

Never was there a performance, apparently, more hugely enjoyed.

It only lasted half an hour. The sport did not seemingly pay any more attention to one of the performers than to the others.

Yet in reality he made a close study of the song and dance woman, Daisy Murdoch.

But, after the show was over, the sport rose from his seat fully as much in the dark as when he sat down.

"I have seen the woman before," he muttered, as, with his companions, he proceeded to the front of the house, "and although I cannot place her, I am satisfied she has been connected with some unpleasant episode in my life."

Then the idea suddenly came to him that it would be the proper thing to invite the "army" who had come so nobly to his rescue, to take something, so all ranged up along the bar and took a drink.

Just as this ceremony was concluded a man hurried into the saloon.

"Say, you, Gordon, thar's going to be trouble when you get outside, for them six fellers who were kicked out are a little way down the street, and they're going for you with revolvers as soon as they kin git a chance."

"I reckon, then, we'll have to go out

and give them a chance at us," Gordon remarked.

"Ef thar' is only six of 'em, we are strong enough to eat 'em up, body and boots," Sandy declared.

"We will not take any unfair advantage, but will give them a good show for their money," the sport asserted, as he led the way out into the open air.

The moon was high in the heavens, and all objects were almost as visible as by daylight.

The six ruffians were about a hundred and fifty feet down the street, hiding behind some empty drygoods boxes.

"Aren't you fellows satisfied with what you have already received," the sport asked.

"Not by a blamed sight," retorted the man who had brought on all the trouble; "you had your fun in kicking us out of the saloon, and now we reckon we'll have ours by filling some of you full of bullet holes."

"A game two can play at," the sport rejoined, "and now, although you did try to take an unfair advantage of me, yet I'm going to give you a square deal."

"We have twelve men here, just double the number of your party, and if we all pitch into you the chances are that you will get pretty badly whipped."

The ruffians looked at each other. They hadn't any idea that their opponents were in such strong force.

In the confusion of the saloon fight there had been no opportunity for them to note how many there were of the party who had put them out of the concert hall.

This announcement, then, took them completely by surprise.

The sport waited for a moment to allow his statement to produce due effect; then he went on:

"You want satisfaction?"

"You bet!" responded the ruffian.

"I am willing to give it to you. I will take five men, and with them give you all the fight you want, so come out from behind your boxes and stand up to the rack like men."

"Oh, yes, we kin do that, every time," the bad man said, as he stepped forth into the middle of the street with his companions.

Gordon then proceeded to select his five men, which was no easy job, for none of the "army" were willing to miss the picnic.

The selection made, Gordon and his picked five took up their position in the middle of the way.

Late as was the hour the altercation had attracted at least a hundred people, who, from sheltered posts, were prepared to enjoy the fight.

"Now, then, are you ready?" the sport called out.

"You bet ye'r boots! Come on as soon as yar like, and we will wipe yer out!" was the vain-glorious reply.

"Now, boys, I calculate to break these fellows all up with one charge, for I reckon they are not the stoutest soldiers in the world," explained Gordon to his followers. "We want to start in with a yell and keep it up. Don't fire a shot, though, until I give the word; then let them have a regular volley. Just remember to aim low, for in the night a man is always apt to overshoot his mark."

"Now, then, are you ready?"

"Ready!" came from the five, in a chorus.

"Go for them!"

With a series of yells the sport and his men rushed forward.

The six ruffians were wondering at the delay, and each and every man of them jumped when this outbreak took place.

"They're trying to scare us, boys, but don't ye be frightened," the leader of the party warned. "Just hold ye'r fire until they git well within range, and then we will plug 'em full of holes."

This was excellent counsel—better could not have been given—but it is no easy matter to hold six men in line, with six more charging down upon them, yelling like wild Indians.

Before the attacking party got within a hundred feet, a couple of the ruffians

got the idea that they were within range, and so opened fire.

The attackers paid no attention to the shots, and it was not until they came within seventy-five feet that the sport gave the command "Fire!"

A regular volley followed.

Although the range was rather a long one for night work, yet two of the bullets took effect, and two of the toughs went down.

This was quite enough for the others, for they took to their heels immediately, fleeing to the right and left and making their escape behind the houses.

The fight was over, and the bystanders were disgusted, for this was not the sort of thing they had calculated upon witnessing.

When Gordon and his followers reached the side of the fallen men they found that one of them was the big fellow who had acted as chief of the party; the other was a small, red-whiskered man.

The big tough was groaning away at a great rate, but the red-whiskered man was only uttering a series of low sighs.

To the experienced ear of Gordon this was a very bad sign, for it indicated that the man was hard hit.

"Are you wounded?" asked the sport of the big fellow.

"Yes; I've got a bullet through my shoulder, and I reckon the chances are great that my time in this world is very short."

"Oh, not so bad as that, I hope," Gordon said, encouragingly.

"Have you any friends in the camp who will take care of you?"

"Not a soul. I don't know anybody in this yere town. I never was here before. I'm from Maryville; but I hope you folks have got charity enough not to let me die like a dog."

"Don't you worry about that," the sport answered, immediately. "I will see that you don't want for anything."

"Pard, ye'r a clean, white man, and no mistake," the tough averred, gratefully.

"But how is it with your pard here?" Gordon questioned. "Judging from the way he is breathing he is pretty severely hurt."

"Yes, he ain't acting as if he'd come out with a scratch."

An examination of the wound of the red-whiskered man revealed the fact that he had got a bullet through the lungs, and as there was no outward bleeding, Gordon, who had had a deal of experience with gunshot wounds, came to the conclusion that he was mortally wounded.

"We must get a stretcher for these two men, and have them carried to the hotel," Gordon decided.

It did not take long for the boys to rig up two contrivances upon which the wounded men could be carried; then the procession started for the hotel.

The sport craved shelter for the wounded men from the landlord, explaining that he would pay all the bills.

"Oh, d'ot vas all right! Mine gootness, v'at kind of a man do you t'ink I vas, my tear Mr. Gordon? I would not refuse them a bed ef I knew I vas never going to get a cent for it," the honest Dutchman declared.

The two men were brought into the hotel and given separate beds in a large, comfortable room.

The doctor had been sent for in haste, and, happening to be in town, he was able to come immediately.

He was an old, gray-haired, gray-bearded ex-army surgeon, with a bluff, dogmatic way.

First he examined the big ruffian.

"The bullet's in the shoulder just under the skin; a man with any gumption could cut it out with a penknife," and this he proceeded to do, in spite of the howls of the wounded man, who protested that he was being murdered.

"Pooh! Nonsense! A pin-scratch—nothing more!"

Then he turned his attention to the other patient.

"Ah! this is a far more serious case! The bullet is in the lungs, and the man is dead!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CORONER TAKES A HAND.

The citizens of the town were considerably excited when they heard the particulars of the street fight.

The big fellow, whose name, by the way, was Frank Roberts, was able to be up and about the same as if nothing had happened.

The coroner was called upon to take charge of the other. He was a miner from Maryville, and answered to the name of Lew Walters.

As soon as the particulars of the affair were made known, the coroner issued warrants for the arrest of Harry Gordon and the five men who had been with him in the street fight.

Warrants were also issued for the arrest of the other four strangers, but no one expected that any of these men would be caught, for all believed they were many miles away from Sulphur Bar long before morning came.

The coroner went ahead with a rush, characteristic of the way in which he did business.

First, he identified the man; then the doctor described how he came to his death; the miner who had brought the challenge to the street fight testified in regard to that fact; then Roberts related how he had marshaled his men in the center of the street, and described the fray, and how he and his companion had been wounded.

Gordon was the next witness. He told the story of the fight from his standpoint.

Then followed the other prisoners, one after the other, each man telling his own story.

A couple of bystanders described what they had seen of the melee.

Then the coroner went into a cross-examination in order to discover, if possible, who had fired the fatal bullet.

Of course, under the circumstances, this was a clear impossibility.

There was a volley of shots, fired by six men—only one bullet was needed to do the killing—fired by a single man, of course; and while it was not possible to say which man that was, it was equally impossible to lay the crime to all six of them.

This problem did not worry the coroner's jury at all. They retired, and deliberated for just five minutes; then they returned with a verdict that the man came to his death by a bullet fired by some party unknown.

This let the six prisoners out, and they were discharged.

During the examination, it will be noticed, there was no attempt made to discover why the men had fought; the coroner considered this a private matter into which he had no right to go.

At the hotel Gordon took Roberts aside. "I reckon you won't be troubled more than a week with your wound."

"That's what the doctor says."

"Well, you needn't trouble yourself about your bill here; I'll settle that for you."

"Much obliged," Roberts exclaimed, gratefully. "You're a white man clean through."

"And now I want you to tell me why it was you and your companions attacked me."

"Why, we were hired to do it, of course," Roberts admitted, apparently much astonished that there should be any question on that point.

"Hired by whom?"

"Blamed ef I know."

"How is that?"

"Well, it won't take me but a minute or so to tell yer all about it."

"Up in Maryville one night I was accosted by a slim little feller who axed me if I wanted a job that would pay me well provided I wasn't particular about it? I told him that I was just hankering for such jobs. Then he explained that he wanted six good men to come down here to Sulphur Bar and do a man up. He would give twenty-five dollars apiece—ten in advance and fifteen when the job was completed."

"I accepted. Then he described you,

and explained how you were to be jumped upon in Paddy Flynn's concert hall."

"This doesn't give a man much of a clew to the man who put up the job on me."

"It don't, for a fact, for I only saw the fellow for a moment, in a dark corner, and I'll be blamed if I think I would be able to recognize him if I saw him again."

"It's mighty unsatisfactory, but, sooner or later, I'll get a clew."

The sport went outside on the porch and sat down and lit a cigar, and while meditating over these strange attacks, a well-dressed young man came up.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Gordon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Jefferson Parker would like to have you call upon him at his store as soon as convenient."

"Jefferson Parker?" echoed the sport, in a tone of inquiry.

"Yes, he keeps that large, red-front store up the street," and the young man pointed out the establishment.

"Yes, I see, and that's Mr. Jefferson Parker's store?"

"It is. The largest in the place."

"Well, I don't remember to have ever made Mr. Jefferson Parker's acquaintance."

"Oh, no, you never have, and that's the reason why he wants you to come down to the store."

"Under the circumstances, then, I reckon that Mr. Parker had better come and see me, if he wants to make my acquaintance, for I'm not in the habit of going about subject to any man's beck and call."

The clerk was apparently much puzzled, and then his face suddenly lighted up.

"Ah, I comprehend," he exclaimed. "You do not understand that Mr. Jefferson Parker is the president of the Law and Order League."

"No; I was not aware of the fact, as I am a stranger in your town."

"I presume you understand now, that when Mr. Parker sends for a man he generally comes," the clerk said, with a laugh.

"Maybe so, but here is one man that will not go."

"You don't mean it," in profound astonishment.

"Oh, yes, I do. I don't know anything about your Law and Order League. I haven't run up against it, nor has it run up against me."

"Well, I will report to Mr. Parker, and I'm sure he will be very much astonished."

"Maybe so. I don't know anything about that. This hotel is my headquarters, and any one who wants to see me can usually find me here."

The clerk nodded, and hurried away.

Gordon watched him until he entered the red-front store.

"Now, what on earth is this Law and Order League, and why has it got after me?"

The puzzled man lit a fresh cigar and turned his attention to a couple of drunken fellows down the street, who were making themselves ridiculous.

While gazing upon them, he heard his name called, and turned to behold a big, powerful man, with a full brown beard, nicely dressed, and bearing the air of a prosperous shopkeeper.

"I am Mr. Jefferson Parker, and would like to have the pleasure of a personal interview with you."

"Certainly, sir, I am at your service," and the sport rose to his feet.

"If you will come with me to my room in the hotel, we can converse there as long as we like."

"That will answer admirably."

The sport led the way to his apartment, placed a chair for his visitor, and, after he was seated, tendered him a cigar.

"Thank you; I don't mind," responded the store-keeper.

Gordon also lit one, and helped himself to a chair.

"Now we are comfortable," the sport remarked, "and you can fire away as soon as you like."

"I come to speak to you upon a rather serious matter, Mr. Gordon," and the

store-keeper spoke in a tone intended to be earnest and impressive.

"Yes? Well, I'll have to admit that you've got the best of me," the sport rejoined. "I don't comprehend what you are driving at."

"My clerk informed me that when he told you I was the president of the Law and Order League it did not seem to make any impression upon you."

"No, it did not. Why should it?"

"My dear sir, the Law and Order League is the organization which runs this town of Sulphur Bar."

"How do you make that out? Where do your alcalde and your marshal come in?"

"The alcalde is a very nice fellow, who makes a fine figure-head and attends to all the routine work of his office nicely, but in the event of a great crisis I fear he would be found wanting, and as for the marshal, he is a man upon whom very little dependence can be placed. As long as he is sober he is all right, but a very small quantity of liquor transforms him into a howling ruffian."

"I wonder at the citizens putting such a man in so responsible an office."

"Because the ruffian element ruled the camp until the Law and Order League arose."

CHAPTER XV.

PLAIN TALK.

"Ah, yes, I begin to comprehend," Gordon asserted. "The Law and Order League is a secret organization which sets out to rule the town."

"Yes, my dear sir, that is a correct statement, but, you understand, it is a power which is not apparent as long as everything goes on smoothly."

"Of course, except in the time of trouble, when it would not be possible for the regular officers of the town to handle the matter, there would be no reason for the existence of a Law and Order League."

The sport nodded, and from the look on his face it was plain that he didn't take much interest in the revelation.

"You are a stranger in Sulphur Bar?"

"Yes."

"May I ask if you intend to remain here for any length of time?"

"Yes, you may ask, but that is all the good it will do you, for I cannot give you any information."

"How? Don't you know whether you are going to stop here or not?"

"No; for that depends upon circumstances entirely beyond my control. If events take a certain course, the chances are that I will remain; if they do not, then I shall be obliged to depart."

Parker shook his head in an amazed way. He began to get the idea that the sport was making game of him, and he didn't like it.

So he tried a fresh tack.

"You are a gambler, I believe?"

The sport looked surprised.

"Oh, dear, no! I am a speculator."

"A speculator in what?"

"In anything and everything in which an honest dollar can be made."

"Chiefly in painted pasteboards, I reckon," Parker declared, with a sneer.

"Well, I do sometimes flip a card when there isn't anything better on hand," the sport admitted.

"I have watched your career with considerable interest, and it strikes me that you have contrived to get yourself into a great deal of trouble since coming to this camp."

"Oh, yes; I have had a little difficulty, but a man must expect that sort of thing in this life, you know."

"And this last affray, in which you were engaged, cost a human life."

"It was an unfortunate thing, and I deeply regret it ever occurred; yet, when you come right down to the truth of the matter, I had no more to do with bringing it on than the man in the moon."

"How can you make that out, when you led the attacking party?"

"Because six men, all of whom sought my life, stood in my way between me and my lodgings. Under such circumstances,

by every law, human or divine, I was justified in using weapons."

"It was a very unfortunate affair," Parker persisted, in a solemn way.

"The principal members of the Law and Order League have been talking the matter over with me, and we have come to the conclusion that you are not going to be a very desirable citizen."

"Well, now, I am really sorry to learn that they have arrived at any such opinion, particularly as I am satisfied it is not justified by the facts of the case."

"My dear sir, the Law and Order League never stop to argue in an affair of this kind," Parker informed, a little arrogantly.

"Oh, yes, I see; you just settle the matter off-hand, and let her go," in a tone of supreme contempt.

Parker winced, but went on:

"You are a gambler in reality, although you profess to be a speculator, but card-playing is actually what you depend upon for a living. Now, we men of the Law and Order League think we've got gamblers enough already in Sulphur Bar, and I have been appointed a committee to wait on you with the suggestion that we think it will be better, both for yourself and for the town, if you could find it convenient to locate somewhere else."

"Couldn't think of such a thing for a moment," responded the sport, with a businesslike air, never betraying the least sign of feeling.

"No; I'm going to settle down here with you for a while, and unless you have made up your mind to offer some extra inducement, I don't think I could be persuaded to get out."

Parker was all attention; the speech aroused his trading instincts.

"What sort of an inducement?" he asked.

"Well, if you Law and Order fellows were to club in together and raise a purse—a good-sized purse of, say, five thousand dollars."

"What a crazy proposition!" Parker exclaimed, in a rage. "Such a thing is utterly ridiculous. The citizens would never listen to it."

"I know the ante is rather high, and I think myself the men would be a set of donkeys to go into it, but under no other conditions will I leave the town until I get good and ready to do so."

"Have you counted the cost of this refusal?" the other asked, in an insinuating way.

"No; for I'm not aware that there is any cost to it."

"Ah, but there is, as I'll soon show you. By refusing to comply with our suggestion you make enemies of most of the influential men of the town, and they'll be ready, at the very first chance, to go for you red hot."

"Aha! There's the point!" the sport replied. "At the very first chance," and Gordon emphasized every word. "You have to get the chance, and that, I calculate, is something which you will not be able to do."

"Owing to a combination of circumstances, the like of which never happened to me before, nor to any other mortal man, I reckon, I have had an extra amount of trouble since coming to this camp, but there isn't one of the difficulties in which I have become involved in which it can be said with truth that I was the aggressor."

"In this last affair the charge might be made, but when it is considered that I had five well-known citizens as my companions, and if I was guilty they were guilty, too, the charge will not hold."

Parker was perplexed. There was no doubt that the sport had altogether the best of the argument.

"Well, it is a matter that you must settle for yourself, of course. I have fulfilled the mission imposed upon me by the Law and Order League—to warn you to get out, and if you don't comply they will try to make it warm for you," and the messenger shook his finger menacingly in the face of the obdurate sport, whereat Gordon lay back in his chair and laughed.

"Oh, come, Parker, you ought to know

that you can't work a game of this kind. If you attack me without reason my friends will rally to my defense."

"Your friends?" the other echoed, in amazement. "Why, how can you, a stranger, have any friends?"

"My dear sir, it is plain that you do not know the temper of your own citizens. I have succeeded in knocking out some pretty good men, and a man who can do that sort of thing is a champion, you understand, and a champion is never without friends."

"Possibly that is correct," Parker observed, as he rose to depart. "I don't know whether it is or not, so I won't say anything about it. I will say, though, that it is my opinion you will find you have made a great mistake in not accepting our advice."

Then he marched forth.

Gordon indulged in a contemptuous laugh.

"Well, I must say, that that fellow is the greatest donkey I've run across for many moons."

"Really, of all the arrogant, overbearing men that I have encountered lately, he is the chief."

The sport then descended to the saloon, where he found Sandy Jones.

Taking him into a corner, he related to him all the particulars of the interview with Parker.

"What is this Law and Order League, Sandy? Does it amount to anything?"

"Oh, yes; the best men in the town are in it. But I don't think that you need to worry. This Parker is a little-too-previous chap, and he and some of the others who are inclined to go off at half-cock got up this little game."

"I don't think I shall lie awake nights thinking of Mr. Parker and his warning. I always do my best to keep within the law, and it is very seldom indeed that I have any trouble with the regular authorities."

"Of course, if I am in a camp where a general rising of the citizens takes place, and they decide that no sport can remain within the limits of their town, then I never say a word, but depart with the rest."

"But, Sandy, there is something mighty strange about this particular warning, and the more I think of it the more I am puzzled," Gordon said, reflectively; "it looks to me as if some underhand work was at the bottom of it."

Sandy pondered over the matter for a few moments, and then, with a shake of his big head, remarked:

"Blame me, sport, if I don't believe you're right; there is an ornery game a-hind it."

"And I will take immediate measures to beat that game. They will go for me on the first occasion, on the ground that I am a gambler, but in a couple of hours I'll be working at a job."

CHAPTER XVI.

A NEW IDEA.

The two were seated at the far corner of the saloon, and, as there was little trade, they were able to converse without danger of being overheard.

"Going to have a job in two hours, hey?" Sandy repeated, with a grin.

"That is my calculation, and if I am putting in a good eight or ten hours' work daily no one has any right to call me a gambler if I play cards a few hours at night. See?"

"You are right thar', by hookey!" Sandy exclaimed. "Why, that little game would beat theirs all to pieces! It wouldn't be possible for anybody to say a word."

"No, I fancy not. I have come to this town to stay a while, and I intend to do it in spite of all the Law and Order Leagues in the world. But now I must go and hunt my job," the sport said, rising.

"I'll go with yer, if yer don't mind," offered Sandy, "for I have a curiosity to see what you will strike."

"Come on!"

The two proceeded to the street.

"Got any idea in regard to the kind of a job you want?" Sandy asked.

"No; I'm not particular, only it must be

one where the work stops at nightfall, so as to give me my evenings to myself."

At this time the two were in front of a cobbler's shop, and Sandy, saying he needed a patch on his boot, they went in.

The cobbler had a good-sized shanty, and sat in the middle of it, surrounded by a pile of old boots and shoes a foot high.

He was a middle-aged man, with iron-gray hair and a short beard of the same hue.

Being quite bald, he had more the appearance of a judge than a cobbler.

He was really a superior man, having a good education and much worldly experience.

His name was David Camp.

"How are ye, Dave, old man?" Sandy saluted, in his usual familiar way. "I reckon I've got a job at cobbling for you here."

"Well, I reckon, Sandy, my boy, you will not get it done," the cobbler replied. "Do you see all this wealth of leather scattered around? There are twenty-five men ahead of you; and now, Sandy, my tulip, what chance do you stand?"

"Mighty poor, I reckon," the miner admitted.

"If you are so driven by work you ought to get an assistant to help you," the sport suggested.

"I would be glad to if I could only pick up such a thing."

"Why? Are cobblers scarce?"

"You bet they are? Scarcer than hons' teeth!" the old man averred, "and I am so pushed just now that I'd be willing to take almost anything in the shape of a cobbler, no matter if he hadn't had much experience in the shop."

"Well, I want a job, and I'd be glad to try my hand at cobbling, but I'll say to you, frankly, that I've never had any experience at all. Still, I am very quick at picking anything up, and I don't see any reason why, in the course of a few days, I could not be of some use to you."

The old man lay back in his seat and fairly roared.

"What, you, Mr. Gordon? The champion of the town take a seat on a cobbler's bench?"

"It does seem rather odd, doesn't it? But I have a good reason for so acting. There are wheels within wheels, you know," the sport intimated.

"Oh, yes; I'm aware of that fact."

"I have contrived to incur the enmity of certain men in this town who are going to make it hot for me if they get the chance."

"Yes, I readily understand how a man who has made the success that you have will have plenty of foes."

"When my enemies get ready to work their game, the main point they will make against me is that I am a gambler without a visible means of occupation. Now, if I am in here with you, learning the shoemaking trade that accusation will not hold water. See?"

"Yes, I see!" the cobbler assented.

"I'm a greenhorn, of course, but I'll do my best to pick up the trade as soon as possible."

"I will be glad to have you come, Mr. Gordon, and I don't doubt that in a week or two you will learn enough of the trade to be of considerable help to me."

"Now, in regard to wages? You want to work this thing right, you know. If you are learning the shoemaker's trade as a means of livelihood, you cannot afford to work for nothing."

"That is correct," the sport agreed.

The cobbler rose to his feet and showed how he had divided the apartment. The partition in the center made two rooms out of it, twelve by ten each. The front one was the shop, and the rear the living apartment.

In the latter were two comfortable bunks, a small stove, and a general assortment of household furniture, such as a man keeping bachelor's hall would require.

"You see, I am pretty comfortably situated," the cobbler observed, "and I give you my word that if you take up your quarters with me you will not suffer."

"No, I fancy not, for you don't look as if you starved yourself."

The cobbler laughed in his hearty, genial way.

"I rather flatter myself I always manage to get enough to eat."

"Well, now, Mr. Gordon, I'll make this proposition to you—I will take you as an apprentice, give you your bed and board and two dollars a week for the first month; for the second I will raise your wages in proportion to the ability which you display at the trade."

"The terms are satisfactory, and I accept them," the sport assented. "I'll commence with you to-morrow morning. I will come to-night, so as to be on hand early in the morning."

"That will do," the cobbler acquiesced. Then they shook hands all round, and the bargain was completed.

Promptly at seven o'clock on the following morning the cobbler and his apprentice set to work.

There was no window curtain, so the whole interior of the shop was visible from the street.

The first citizen who came along after the men had taken their positions on their benches noticed the new man.

"Hello! Old man Camp has got a helper! Well, Heaven knows he has needed one bad enough for a long time."

"Christopher Columbus!"

The citizen came to a halt as he uttered this exclamation; he had just caught a view of the helper's face.

Could it be possible that this man in a pair of rough pantaloons and a red shirt, seated on a cobbler's bench, rapping away industriously on the sole of a shoe, was Harry Gordon, the all-around sport?

A second glance showed that it was the truth.

The citizen quickly hurried to the nearest saloon to reveal the astounding intelligence.

News of this sort spreads rapidly, and within fifteen minutes there was a crowd of at least thirty people standing in front of the cobbler's shop, gazing in at the workmen.

They, on their part, did not pay any attention to the loungers, but went on with their avocation just as if there wasn't a soul in sight.

Ten minutes more, and there were fifty people, and then "The Great American Business Man" took charge of the thing.

"Appoint a committee of one to go in and see what this means? I'll be your committee, if you like."

He was appointed by acclamation on the spot.

The committee marched into the shop.

"Good-morning, Mr. Gordon! Your fellow-citizens on the outside thar' are literally flabbergasted by this new departure of yours, and have appointed me a committee of one to find out what it means."

"Of course we're aware that it ain't no business of ours, and if you choosed to boot me out of the shop for my impudence in asking I wouldn't have no right to complain."

"But, Mr. Gordon, it is because, since coming to this camp, you have made yourself a sort of public character by showing that you're the best man of your inches that ever stepped foot in Sulphur Bar—it is on this account that your fellow-citizens take so great an interest in whatever you may do, and we hope you won't feel hard on us for so doing."

"Oh, not at all," the sport replied cheerfully. "Your curiosity is perfectly natural under the circumstances, and I've no objection to gratifying it."

"I have gone in as an apprentice with Mr. Camp here, to learn the cobbler's trade."

"You don't mean it?" the citizen cried.

"Oh, yes, I mean it; it is the truth. You may ask Mr. Camp."

"The statement is correct," the shoemaker replied, "and I trust to be able, in a month or two, to make a first-class cobbler out of him!"

"Well, I will be blamed if this don't beat my time!"

"There is really no reason for surprise," Gordon remarked. "Every man ought to have a trade. I haven't one, and I made

up my mind some time ago to learn a good trade at the first favorable opportunity."

"Yas, yas, I see!" the citizen said, as he retreated.

He made his report, but the town couldn't get over its astonishment.

CHAPTER XVII.

A STORMY TIME.

About the most astonished man in Sulphur Bar, when he learned of the new departure of the sport, was the town marshal, Black Bill Roberts.

He wouldn't have it, for a cent. Oh, no! No one could fool him with any such yarn, and it wasn't until he went and saw with his own eyes the sport hammering away on the cobbler's bench that he yielded belief.

Then his suspicions were immediately aroused.

"He is up to some mighty mean kind of a trick, you bet your life!" the marshal declared, as from a convenient distance he watched the sport working away busily.

"It's a mighty lucky thing that I'm in town, but I am here, and I reckon I'll be able to bust up any little game of his before he kin get well started on it.

Then the marshal hastened to lay his suspicious before the alcalde, but that officer, Maurice Littlefield, was a sensible, level-headed American.

He had met the sport, and so flattered himself that he knew as much about him as any one else in the town.

He laughed at the marshal's suspicions.

"Maybe he is up to some deep game, but it strikes me that a man who is putting in from seven in the morning until six in the evening at a cobbler's bench won't have much time for games or schemes of any sort.

"Haven't you heard the explanation which the sport gives for his going with Camp?"

"Oh, yas; but I don't take no stock in it. That's only a bluff, put out to shield his real purpose. You jist-mark my words—he is working some deep game, and it will come out one of these days."

"Oh, no," the alcalde declared, a little impatiently. "The sport is a peculiar fellow, one of the drive-ahead style, who finds it impossible to keep quiet. During the daytime he hasn't anything to do, and I don't doubt he spends many lonely hours. This cobbling gives him occupation."

"Such fellers as he is spend their time loafing around bar-rooms, waiting for some one to hang 'em up for the drinks."

"This Gordon is not a man of that stamp," the alcalde observed, perceiving from this observation what a fearful misconception the marshal had of the sport.

"You will find out what kind of a man he is before you git through with him," the marshal declared, in a mysterious way, as he took his departure.

"By gum! that alcalde is a natural born idjet! He don't think anybody in the world knows anything but himself, but all the same, the thing ought to be attended to."

Then a bright idea came to Black Bill. The Law and Order League!

"I'll see old Parker at once!" he decided.

The marshal hurried to Parker's store, where he laid his suspicions before his eminence in his private office.

"I am very glad you came, Mr. Marshal, for the alcade is inclined to be too lax altogether in matters of this kind."

"That is so, for a fact."

"But we have got the man down in our books, and you can rely upon it we will take care of him."

"I understand this cobbler game. He is afraid that some one will declare he is a gambler and ought not to be allowed to stay in the town. Then he can reply that, if he does play cards, it is only for amusement, for he has a regular trade for his own support."

"Mighty clever trick, too."

"The fellow is shrewd enough, and he thinks by this new game that he has made himself solid; but there is more than one way to kill a cat, you under-

stand," the head of the Law and Order League declared, with a mysterious wink.

"You bet your life!" Black Bill replied, with another wink.

"The leading members of our organization have talked the case of this sport over, and we have come to the conclusion that the town would be a great deal more healthy without his presence."

"Yes, sir; that's jist what I've been saying right along—ever since the galoot struck the camp."

"But we can't do anything against him until he commits some overt act, and as I feel certain he is now on his guard, he will be very careful what he does."

"Yes, he is cunning enough."

"Now, Bill, the thing might be worked in this way."

"If you could find some man who had a grudge against him, and for twenty-five or thirty dollars would be willing to try and get square, that would work, I think."

"I know jist the man!" the marshal declared. "I'll take charge of the job."

And this ended the interview.

The marshal went on a spree that afternoon—about the worst one that anybody had ever seen him on. Old citizens who were well acquainted with the man shook their heads when they saw him marching up and down the street from saloon to saloon, with his head high in the air.

Black Bill was one of those peculiar men who never staggered, no matter how much liquor he drank.

When the proper quantity had been imbibed he simply collapsed, and sank into a drunken slumber.

"I tell you what it is," said one citizen to another, as they watched Bill's antics. "If this here thing keeps on there will be trouble to-night. He has got to the shooting stage, when he'd jist as soon kill a man as look at him."

"Somebody ought to try and get him home to lie down and sleep it off," intimated the other.

"No use, no use," responded the first; "when Black Bill gets in this stage nobody can do anything with him."

Slowly the shades of night descended upon the town. Lights came out and the streets began to liven up.

At nine o'clock, Gordon, arrayed in his usual costume, came out of the shop with Camp, and they walked to the hotel in company.

The saloon was well filled, and a deal of good-natured fun was poked at the sport.

He replied in kind, for he understood there was no malice in it.

There was a jolly little party down at the extreme end of the bar, the farthest from the door, enjoying themselves in story-telling and cracking jokes.

In this group was Sandy Jones, the sport, Camp, the shoemaker; the postmaster, Tom Mack, and a couple of miners from the Golden Elephant property.

As it happened, there was an unusually lively party in the hotel saloon on this particular evening.

No one had drunk too much, and every one seemed to be laughing.

Into this peaceful Eden came the marshal, full of liquor, arrogant and quarrelsome.

"Hey, you boyces! Having a right smart time, I reckon!" the new-comer cried; "but if you want to have a rip roaring time, you hev' got to git me into it, for I'm the man w'at kin make things hum."

"Mebbe some of you gents here don't know who I am. If so, I suppose I ought to introduce myself. I am roaring Black Bill Roberts, and I can whip my weight in wildeats. When I get on the war-path the boys make haste to clear the track, jist like as if a locomotive was coming, as they know when I git started I am out always for blood," and then the marshal executed a war-dance in the middle of the saloon.

Every eye in the place, of course, was fixed on him, and yet each-and every man tried to pretend he wasn't looking at him, being fearful of attracting the big ruffian's attention.

The honest Dutchman was all of a tremble, for he had never seen the mar-

shal as bad as this before, but he made a strong attempt to appear at his ease.

"Ah! how you was finding yourself d'is efening, marshal?" he said. "I hope you was pretty well. V'at are you going to take? A leedle of d'ot old stuff d'ot goes so quickly to the right spot, d'ot goot old whisky?"

"Well, I don't know 'bout yer bug-juice, Jake," Black Bill replied. "The last time I was here and took a h'ist of your benzine I reckoned I was poisoned."

"Ah, yes; d'ot was a goot joke on me, marshal," the landlord returned, with a forced laugh.

"You are von of d'ose kind of men d'ot can put up such jokes."

Jake put out the whisky and the glass. Black Bill helped himself to a stiff

drink and then condescendingly remarked:

"Why, Jake, I reckon you must have been getting in some new fire-water, for this stuff is fit for any gentleman to drink."

"Yes, I had some fresh barrels come mid d'er day," the landlord informed, unblushingly.

In reality it was the same old whisky.

Wiping his mouth with the back of his big hand, the marshal looked around the saloon and at once caught sight of the sport. A dark look passed over his swollen face.

"Hullo, you, Gordon! Got back into yer monkey jacket again, hesn't yer? Which do you like best, cobbling shoes in a red shirt in the daytime or robbing tenderfeet of their ducats by cheating 'em at cards at night?"

"Don't you dare to call me a cheat!" cried Gordon, advancing on the marshal at once.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LITTLE FUSS.

"W'at's that? Do you dare to talk back to me? You mean, miserable, no-account, two-cent gambler!" the marshal roared.

"See here, marshal, I don't want to have any trouble with you, but I give you fair warning that I don't allow any living man to use such language to me as you've jist indulged in."

"Oh, yer don't, hey? What do yer do if a man takes it in his head to tell yer jist what he thinks of yer?" Black Bill demanded to know.

"I whale him until he gets some sense into his head."

"Mebbe you'd like to whale me?" the marshal exclaimed, defiantly.

"I most certainly will unless you keep a civil tongue in your head."

"Do you know that I've killed a dozen better men than you are, you two-cent sport?"

"Mebbe you have, but that fact don't frighten me at all."

"Why, for two cents I'd wipe yer out now!" and then up came the right arm of the marshal.

The hand clutched a cocked revolver, which no one had noticed that he had possessed, as he had slyly drawn it, and held it in against the leg of his pantaloons.

He had the sport at a decided disadvantage, and was crazy enough with liquor to improve the opportunity.

He fired point blank at Gordon's head, and this would surely have been the end of the sport had not a miner in the rear of the marshal, reluctant to see a man murdered in cold blood, knocked up his arm jist as he pulled the trigger.

The consequence was that the bullet went high of the mark.

The sport jumped for the officer at once, knocked him down, and took away his weapons.

"You are so drunk that you don't know what you're doing, and for that reason I spare your life!" the sport exclaimed, as he rose to his feet.

Black Bill was furious, and when he got on his legs, seemed, in his rage, to be more like an animal than a man.

He had another revolver, which he drew as speedily as possible.

Gordon was on the lookout for jist such a movement, and wrested it from him before he could get a chance to cock it.

An eight-inch bowie-knife was the next weapon the maddened man produced, and the sport relieved him of this as quickly as of the others.

By this time Black Bill was like a wild beast, and he rushed at Gordon, clutching at his throat as an insane man might have done.

The sport promptly knocked him down, and when he rose, knocked him down again and again, until finally the infuriated ruffian got a blow on the point of the jaw, which reduced him into insensibility.

"He is game, but he is not in it," was the sarcastic comment of Sandy Jones.

The marshal's friends carried him off for repairs, for it was evident that he had got about all the punishment he could stand.

"D'ot vas d'e first time d'ot the marshal got on a spree without killing two or three men before he was over it!" Dutch Jake declared.

"Yes, such, I believe, is the man's reputation, but he didn't get the chance to kill any one this time," Gordon remarked.

"You will have to be on the lookout from this time forth," said one of the citizens to the sport, "for he will have it in for you and will surely kill you if he can."

"That won't be anything new; the man has had a grudge against me from the time I struck the town."

"This thing had to come, some time, and I'm only sorry we didn't wind it up for good and all to-night," Gordon responded, regretfully; "but, under the circumstances, it was not possible; the man was too drunk to make a good fight for his life, although he was anxious enough to kill me."

"I will not take any unfair advantage. I expect to be obliged to lay the man out, and I don't want any one to have the shadow of a right to go around the camp and declare that I jumped on a man when he wasn't able to take care of himself."

The bystanders agreed that the sport had the right idea of the thing.

Then Gordon invited the crowd to take a drink with him, and after the drink he and the shoemaker proceeded to their shanty.

"I suppose that, after this little affair to-night, there can be but one end to the thing. You must kill the marshal or he will kill you."

"It looks that way, for I was obliged to give him a fearful thrashing in presence of everybody, and of course after such an affront as that he couldn't think of holding his position as marshal of the town unless he secured ample satisfaction."

"It is an unfortunate affair," Camp remarked.

"Yes, but it could not be avoided; it was either knuckle to the man, or else fight him. I can't knuckle, and I can fight."

By this time the pair had reached their home, and at once retired to rest.

Every man who passed the shoemaker's shop that night shook his head as he glanced at it, for one and all knew that there was bloody work ahead.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MARSHAL SEEKS SATISFACTION.

Never was there a more astonished and disgusted man than the marshal when his friends brought him out of the collapse into which the iron fists of the sport had thrown him.

"Say, boys, w'at's the meaning of this here?" he asked, as he rose to a sitting posture on his bunk. "Did that blamed galoot of a sport knock me out for good and all?"

"He did for a fact, marshal, and to give you the real straight article, he did not have much trouble in doing it, either," the friend responded.

"I was a fool to try him on at any such game, for of course that is his best thing, and I don't pretend to do much in that line. Then, too, I had a fearful jag on me."

The rough treatment which the marshal had received had about sobered him up.

"I will git squar' with him, but I will not call upon my fists to help me out."

Then the tough and his friends had a drink, and each went his way.

The marshal proceeded to the restaurant and got his breakfast, then to his room, which was up-stairs.

Then he inspected his revolvers to see that they were in perfect order, for after the marshal had been carried off by his companions, the sport had sent his weapons after him.

"I reckon these tools are all right, and a man need not be afraid to trust his life to the workings of them," the marshal exclaimed, in a self-satisfied way.

"This town needs a shake-up, and I will give it the biggest kind of a one before any galoot in the place gits his dinner."

The officer loafed about the restaurant until about ten o'clock; then he came out and took his way up the street toward the shoemaker's shop.

There was quite a crowd around Camp's establishment, as if all had anticipated a ruction that morning.

The marshal walked on until he came within a hundred feet of the place; then he marched out into the middle of the street.

Camp and Gordon were in the shop, seated on their benches, working away at their best speed.

The marshal halted in front of the shop and about fifty paces from it; then he whipped out his revolvers.

"Dust out of thar', Camp! Lively, now, for I'm going to kill that galoot in the red shirt in thar' with you."

Camp did "dust out" lively. The speed with which he dropped his tools and raced through the door into the rear apartment was laughable.

Gordon, too, was on his feet in an instant; his tools were dropped fully as quickly as Camp's, but in their place were two nickel-plated revolvers.

Thus it happened that both antagonists commenced firing at the same time.

It was short range; both men were goods shots; and they fired to kill.

The sport was the first to be hit; he got a bullet in the fleshy part of the shoulder, a trifling wound.

His first shot did more damage, the ball striking the marshal in the chest.

Roberts staggered, but he was game and would not give up.

The two men now were firing as fast as they could pull the triggers, nor did they stop until their weapons were emptied.

Then both men were on the ground, incapable, apparently, of further battle.

The citizens came in great numbers.

The marshal's friends carried him away, while the good-natured Dutch landlord had the sport removed to his room in the hotel.

The doctor was sent for in haste, and he stopped at the hotel first.

Gordon was wounded in three places, but there was no likelihood that any of them would give him any particular trouble.

So good a report could not be made of the marshal. He had been hit six times, and three of the bullets had penetrated vital places.

"There is no hope for him," the doctor announced. "He may linger on for a day or two, and then again he may go at any moment."

This news created universal excitement, and the men who had been lucky enough to witness the fight were in great demand.

Nobody was astonished, though, because Gordon had wiped out the marshal, for it wasn't to be expected that an ordinary ruffian such as Black Bill was should be able to hold his own with a champion of champions like Gordon.

Old, far-seeing citizens shook their heads.

"There is going to be a deal of trouble come out of this affair," they declared.

"The marshal had a heap of friends, and if he dies you may depend upon it they will do their best to get satisfaction."

"You see, a good many men had a high opinion of the marshal, although he did make such a fearful donkey of himself when he went on a 'tare,' and at such a time was as likely to kill his best friend as his worst enemy."

Owing to the report of the doctor, about everybody in the town had got the idea that the marshal would die, and one of the most sincerely sorry men was the head of the Law and Order League, Jefferson Parker.

As soon as he learned the particulars of the affair, and how badly the officer was hurt, he hastened to his apartment to condole with him.

"I had no idea," he said, "that you would take this game on yourself. I thought, of course, that you'd go and find some feller who made a business of that sort of thing."

"That is jest w'at I intended to do," the other replied, "but I didn't happen to come across anybody, and I got on one of my 'tares,' met the sport, and went in to clean him out instanter, after my usual fashion when I git going."

"The man was too much for me, and under those circumstances a feller has got to keep at it until he cleans out his man or gits cleaned out himself."

Parker nodded assent. He understood that this was the stern code of the Wild West.

"Well, I'm sorry, old man, that you came out so badly, but it will be better luck next time."

"As for the sport, you understand that no matter what happens to you, he is not going to be allowed to stay in the town."

"Do yer know that I ain't haukerin' for the job of hunting him out?"

"I suppose not."

"No, sir; I've got all of this sport that I want. If there's any other fool around who thinks he can do something with him, he is welcome to try, but no more of it for me, thank you."

"I don't blame you, Bill, for you have been roughly handled," and Parker departed.

The doctor's diagnosis was singularly correct. The sport rapidly got well, while the marshal as rapidly got worse, and when they came to give him his breakfast one morning they found that he had gone to that land of the hereafter where the weary are at rest.

Black Bill had gone upon his last spree.

CHAPTER XX.

THE INQUEST.

The death of the marshal created a great deal of excitement, of course.

The coroner took hold of the case with his usual promptness.

Gordon surrendered himself as being concerned in the death.

No one had any doubt as to how the case would turn out.

It could be easily proven that the marshal went to Camp's shop with revolvers in hand and called upon the shoemaker to get out of the way so that he could kill his assistant.

When a man goes in to do a job of this kind, to take the law in his own hands, he has no right to complain if he gets the worst of it.

The coroner's inquest went ahead as usual. Gordon was charged with the killing of the man, and all the evidence in regard to the case was presented.

It was a case of self-defense; the smartest lawyers in the world couldn't have made anything else out of it; therefore the sport was acquitted as soon as the jury got hold of the matter; every man of them pronounced it a clear case of self-protection—of a man on his own threshold defending his home against an aggressive enemy.

The sport received a regular ovation after the trial ended, and he was discharged. In fact, he found it hard work to get away from some of his friends.

When he reached the hotel he found Dutch Jake all smiles.

"Ah! how you vas, my tear fr'en' Mr. Gordon?" the landlord exclaimed. "You got out mit d'ot scrape as fine as silk,

und I tells you right here, Mr. Gordon, somebody ought to have killed d'ot marshal years ago.

"To my own knowledge he has killed, right in d'is town, eight or ten men—most of them who was innocent tenderfoots, doing nod'ing to nobody."

"It's all right, Jake, but I'd just as lief somebody else would do this sort of killing."

"Yes, I should not care to do d'ot sort of thing mineself."

"It isn't a pleasant position, although the office of sheriff of any leading county in the East is considered a very valuable one, and men spend hundreds of dollars to get it, yet the sheriff does all the hanging."

"D'ot was all rid't. I was not a sheriff, nor would I be one."

At this point a miner came hastily into the saloon, and by his face one could see that he brought startling intelligence.

"Say, boys, the devil's to pay down at the Golden Elephant property. A gang have jumped the mine."

"Oho! This is news, indeed!" the sport declared. "Did you learn any of the particulars? Who is the leader of the party? And under what pretense have they taken so bold a measure?"

"No, I didn't hear anything but that a party had seized the property and put Robert Manchester and his men out."

"The easiest way to get at the truth will be for me to take a walk down in that direction and interview the parties in control of the mine," the sport suggested.

"Yes, d'ot was so. D'ere was nothing like going yourself v'en you wants to find out anything," the landlord rejoined, in a wise way.

The sport set out at once and proceeded in a leisurely manner to the little gulch where the Golden Elephant property was situated.

On the way he encountered Robert Manchester.

"Hello! I hear you've been having trouble down at your place," Gordon accosted.

"Yes; for the present I am out of the Golden Elephant property, bag and baggage."

"Why, how is that?"

"The mine has been jumped."

"By whom?"

"Jack La Mothe is at the head of the party, but, of course, as he never would be able to raise the ducats to pay the attacking force, I suppose he represents a syndicate," Manchester explained. "That is the claim he makes, anyway."

"I don't suppose you anticipated any movement of the kind, and so were taken completely by surprise?"

"I never was more astonished in my life. If I had expected anything of the kind I could easily have made arrangements by means of which I could hold the mine with six men against a hundred."

"The mine is at the end of a small gulch, and no way of getting at it except through the entrance to that gulch."

"I understand; a few men posted in that entrance could hold a big number at bay, and you, of course, not anticipating an attack, were not on your guard."

"That is correct, and so I fell an easy prey."

"But, I say, Manchester," said the sport, as the idea came to him, "isn't it rather risky business to jump a mine which is in the hands of a receiver? Isn't that bucking up against United States law and the United States Government as well, with all that that implies?"

"Yes," Manchester answered. "When you come right down to the truth of the matter, but when you come to look into the facts of the case the government will very seldom trouble itself about these little petty mining troubles. If you happen to possess a large amount of political influence you may be able to do something, otherwise you'll wait a long time before you get the Government to do any interfering."

"But, I say, what claim does Jack La Mothe and his party put in for the mine?"

"They have bought the rights of a fel-

low called Tom Prior, but, as Tom Prior never owned but one-third of the mine, this seizing of the whole property in satisfaction of Mr. Tom Prior's one-third is one of the cheekiest pieces of business on record."

"It certainly is; but how is this thing going to be straightened out?" the sport asked, rather perplexed.

"I have made a move that will checkmate all of these sharpers, and settle the thing in short order, for as soon as the mine was jumped I sent Lawyer Smith over to the court to apply for an order for the sale of the mine to the highest bidder, in open court, and a legal division of the money which the mine might bring to the rightful claimants who could show to the satisfaction of the court that they were entitled to a share."

The sport laughed.

"That will certainly settle the thing, but not to the liking, I'm thinking, of some of the parties interested."

"Perhaps not!"

Then the two parted, Manchester going on toward the camp, and Gordon in the direction of the gulch.

"I'll have one advantage," the sport mused, as he went on. "No one will suspect that I have any interest in the matter beyond that of pure curiosity, so I'll probably be able to learn all about the affair."

When he arrived at the mouth of the gulch he found that it had been picketed in regular soldier fashion.

Four men were on guard, and a hundred yards back were a half a dozen more.

Trees had been felled and a breastwork thrown up at this last point.

The gulch was only about fifty feet wide, so it had not been any particular trouble for the holders of the mine to build the fortification.

The sport had a soldier's eye, and after glancing over this war-like preparation, muttered:

"Egad! with ten men I would engage to hold this against a couple of hundred."

As he advanced up the gulch the sentinel stopped him.

"Whom do you wish to see?" he asked.

"Well, I don't know as I want to see any one in particular," the sport replied, affecting to be greatly astonished; "but, I say, I don't understand the meaning of this sort of thing. What do you mean by halting me and demanding whom I want to see?"

"There has been a little trouble in this gulch. There is a mine here which is claimed by half a dozen parties. One of the aforesaid has taken time by the forelock and seized upon the claim. We think we've got the best right to it and are going to hold on to the property until a stronger force puts us out."

"Yes, I comprehend. I've heard of such things, but never happened to witness one before."

"You must excuse me for intruding. I wasn't aware that there would be any objection to my looking at the mine, for I heard the property was in the market and I thought, maybe, that it might be a good investment for me. Ta, ta!"

The sport turned and retraced his steps.

As soon as he got a couple of hundred yards away, Jack La Mothe rose from behind the shelter of some bushes, where he had been reclining.

"That sport means mischief," he exclaimed. "He didn't come down here just for the sake of looking at the property. Long before he left the town the news of the jumping of the mine must have been all over it."

"What is the game? Are they going to club together and raise a force and put this sport at the head of it, and go in to fight us for the property?"

The speaker looked nervous as he made the suggestion.

"If that is the game, all we can do is to go in and do our best to beat it."

"I must have more men, more barricades, and take care to post a better lookout."

"Now that we have secured the claim, and with very little trouble, too, it would be a frightful shame for the property to be wrested from us."

Then Jack La Mothe took his way to Sulphur Bar, and there made a call upon Jefferson Parker.

It was Jefferson Parker who was the "syndicate." It was he who was finding the money, and who would profit if the mine turned out to be a great gain.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SPORT IS ASTONISHED.

On that same evening, about nine o'clock, Gordon sat on the porch of the hotel smoking a cigar.

He was engaged for a little poker party at ten, to which he was looking forward with considerable pleasure.

Those who composed it were all jolly chaps—men possessed of a goodly amount of this world's goods, and who could afford to lose a fair amount of money without feeling it in the least.

"To sit down to a poker game with men of this kind is a positive pleasure," the sport observed, as he reflected upon the night's enjoyment that was before him. "I shall have a good time, and stand a fair chance of making a little money besides."

Along the street came a slender, well-dressed young man, flourishing a light cane.

As soon as he saw the sport he went up to the porch and accosted him.

"Is this Mr. Gordon?"

"Yes; that is my name."

"I am pleased to have the honor of your acquaintance," said the new-comer, with a polite bow.

"I would be glad to know you, sir," the sport replied.

"My name is Richard Thompson. I am a lawyer by profession, in Judge Abram Turner's office."

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Thompson," and the two men shook hands in a ceremonious manner.

Then Thompson helped himself to a chair at the sport's side.

"This is a little business call, Mr. Gordon. I have been instructed to see if I couldn't secure you for a client for our office. A man of your occupation is bound to have more or less trouble, and the services of a good firm of lawyers would come in very handy at times."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly."

"Of course you understand, Mr. Gordon, that it isn't the old judge who is putting up this sort of thing. He would die of hunger before he would solicit any man to secure his professional assistance, and we young chaps wouldn't be apt to do it, of course."

Gordon looked surprised.

"If it isn't the head of the firm, nor the clerks, who is it?"

"Ahem! There is a lady in the case!"

"Oho! Is that so?" exclaimed the sport, so astonished as to be betrayed into this commonplace observation.

"She doesn't mind your knowing all the particulars, either."

"That is considerate."

"It is Miss Jennie Turner, the judge's daughter."

"Yes; I have seen the lady."

"And she has taken a great interest in you. She has watched these trials of yours, and she doesn't think that you have had a fair chance any time. And she knows that a few foes on the jury and the clamors of an ignorant multitude might cost you your life."

"That is very true," the sport assented.

"And this law business, you understand, is not to cost you anything."

"Ah, now, stop! What a strange thing it is that women will make such mistakes."

"Now, Thompson, when the lady proposed the scheme to you, for you to repeat it to me, why didn't you tell her immediately that she was making the biggest kind of a mistake."

"I am not the man to permit others to pay my bills, and if a man had made such a proposition I would have promptly told him that he was insulting me, and have called him to a quick account."

"Certainly. Of course!" Thompson assented. "But with a lady I thought the case might be different!"

"Not at all. And there are reasons why I couldn't accept any such favor

from a woman anyway. You understand that I do a good deal of card-playing?"

"Yes; so I have understood."

"And all men who play cards more or less are inclined to certain superstitions, which are no modern idea, but go way back to the time of the ancient Egyptians."

"Now, one of the most rock-founded superstitions of the gambler is that it is unlucky for him to have much of anything to do with women."

"It strikes me that I've heard something of this before," Thompson observed; "but, surely, it is not possible that you believe in these things?"

"Yes, I do, for I've seen plenty of instances to prove that there is a deal in them. A man who takes the chances that a gambler does is very foolish if he allows himself to give away a single point. His whole fortune may sometimes depend upon the turn of a card."

"How important, then, that he should do everything in his power to make that turn a successful one!"

"That is true," Thompson agreed.

"Yes, sir; I pay all sorts of attention to superstitions," the sport declared; "and further, to put it to you fairly and squarely, do you know any man who does not pay more or less attention to superstition?"

"Well, I don't know about that," the lawyer demurred, in a reflective way; "I suppose most men do pay some little attention to such things."

"There is no doubt about it," the sport avowed. "Let us come right down now, and make a personal matter of it. Take yourself, for instance: How do you feel about commencing anything on a Friday?"

"Aha!" laughed the lawyer; "you are giving me the strongest superstition of the lot."

"Of course; for only the strongest would affect a man like yourself."

"Well, I am afraid I'll have to admit that I would not like to commence anything important on that day."

"No more would I—no more would seventy-five per cent. of the world."

"I think you're right. At all events, you have given me some new ideas." Then the lawyer nodded and passed on.

The next party to come up the street was the receiver of the Golden Elephant mine, Robert Manchester.

He hesitated for a moment when he saw the sport, then came to the edge of the platform and took a seat upon it within a yard of Gordon.

"I am a rather peculiar old chap, and often do queer things," he said.

"Now, since the jumping of the mine, I have had an opportunity to examine all the papers in the case, upon which the judge bases his decision, and find that Miss Underwood really has more claim to the property than anybody else; so the judge has suggested to me, why doesn't she raise a force and clean these jumpers out? It is not likely she would have trouble with anybody else, and she would be put in possession of the property."

"Yes; but young women are not always in a condition to make a fight of this kind," the sport suggested.

"Just what I told the judge, and he said it was a pity, but, under the circumstances, it seemed to him that there would have to be a fight before the possession of the mine could be settled."

"No doubt about the truth of that," the sport assumed.

"I told you I was an odd fellow, and as I caught sight of your face to-night a scheme came into my mind by which I think we could make fifteen or twenty thousand dollars apiece."

"You are the very man I am looking for," the sport admitted; "so go ahead, explain the particulars; but, mind you, I'm not the kind of man who wants all, or anything but what is justly mine."

"It's this Golden Elephant business. Miss Underwood has the title, but can't push her claim. I am the lawyer, better acquainted with the affair than any one else. You are the fighting man who can take charge of the army."

"Now, if we three go in together, I think we stand a big chance to win."

"Undoubtedly. And I'll take command of the fighting force if Miss Underwood is in it."

CHAPTER XXII.

RAISING THE ARMY.

"I suppose I would have to take a two-fold part in this affair," Manchester remarked, "for there will be money needed, as money is the sinews of war."

"Now, during the past year, I have managed to feather my nest pretty well, and I can afford to risk a couple of thousand dollars in this enterprise, and I don't know of anything in sight that looks to me as promising."

"Well, I'm not particularly well posted, for I am not a speculator in a regular way, but it certainly looks to me as if there was money in this if the mine is a good one."

Manchester looked around cautiously, so as to be sure that no one would overhear his words.

"The ore is improving by fits and starts, but gradually improving all the time," he stated.

"In that case, then, it is our game to raise our army and put these fellows out as soon as possible, so as not to give them a chance to discover just how valuable the property really is."

"You have the right idea."

Gordon arose to his feet.

"Come on, then; we'll see whom we can pick up to-night, for the quicker we go ahead the better."

The two proceeded up the street, paying a visit to every popular resort.

Of course, everybody knew the sport, and everybody wanted him to take a drink with them, but Gordon smilingly demurred that it wasn't his drinking night, and reckoned they would have to excuse him, which every one of them did.

"It's astonishing how much excusing a champion can get, while a common man would either have to drink or fight, for that is a clause in the code of the Wild West," Manchester had to remark as they proceeded on their round.

In the first saloon the sport ran across a couple of men who looked as if they would do good service.

"Are you open for a job, boys?" he asked.

"Yes," the pair replied; "we are getting close to bedrock, and hain't struck anything for ten days."

"Well, if you ain't particular about the work I can give you a job."

"We're not particular, and I reckon we can give a pretty good guess at what it is, too, for we've heard about this mine being jumped, and I s'pose you are raising a party to rejump the claim?"

"That is what I want to do. I don't propose to allow these fellows to hold a property to which they have not the shadow of a right."

"No; I can testify in regard to that," Robert Manchester supplemented. "They claim to have a deed from Miss Underwood and her brother, but I know that the deed is a forgery, and the young lady had no more to do with it than the man in the moon."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that," one of the miners said, "for when I go into a war I allers like to feel that I am in on the right side."

"In this case you surely are," Manchester declared.

Then the party went on, the two miners accompanying Manchester and the sport.

With such a man as Gordon at the head of the "army" it was not a difficult matter to secure men, for all the town had confidence that he understood the art of war and would put up a red-hot fight.

By eleven o'clock the all-around belligerent had secured the men he wanted—twenty being regarded as the proper number.

As each man was engaged he was sent to the shoemaker's shop, and with the last two recruits went Gordon and Manchester.

After the "army" had assembled, Gordon took a good look at them, and was pleased to express his opinion that they could whip their weight in wildcats if they would only bring themselves to think so.

"Self-confidence is half the battle, boys,

if you only choose to think so. Sail in with the conviction that the other fellow doesn't stand any chance, and you have got him," which the majority of the recruits thought was quite true.

"Now, I don't propose to attack until about three o'clock in the morning, when, as a rule, human sleep is the deepest. Then we must creep up on the sentries in the good old Indian fashion, surprise, gag and disarm them. I hope to do this without alarming the main camp, and if it can be accomplished, then the property will be ours, for we can take all the others in their beds, and they will have no opportunity to fight."

All were sure this scheme could not help succeeding.

At one o'clock the expedition started on its way. Through the darkness they stole like so many walking night spirits, with noiseless steps, and not a soul did they encounter on their way.

The night was only semi-dark, so they had plenty of light to see what they were about.

Considerable timber grew in the neighborhood of the Golden Elephant, and by using its cover they got quite near the works without being seen, but Gordon knew that at the mouth of the gulch a sentinel was posted.

"This Jack La Mothe is a tolerably smart fellow, I take it, and may be keen enough to decide that two men will keep awake better than one, so I had best prepare to take care of two men."

The sport selecting two of his best fellows, through the trees and bushes the three at once proceeded, the sport in advance, bent almost to the level of the ground. The idea was to flank the position of his enemy, and when he came upon them, a little to their rear, he discovered that there were two of the guards, and that both of them were sound asleep, snoring away at a great rate.

"We've got a picnic here, boys," the sport whispered as he stole forward.

Under the circumstances it was an easy matter to seize, gag and bind the men hard and fast.

This being accomplished, the three rejoined the main body.

Then they stole noiselessly forward to the mine.

The property consisted of a few buildings. There was the ore crusher, running five stamps; the adjoining building, where the crushed ore went through the amalgamator; the bunk house for the men; the dining-room shanty, the office, and the home of the proprietor, which latter was quite a really good structure.

As a rule all these mining establishments are constructed on the same plan, so, although the sport had never had a chance to examine the Golden Elephant plant, yet he knew exactly how to proceed.

Doors are seldom locked in the far Western mining-camp, and on this occasion the door into the bunk-room happened to be open.

The general-in-chief did not delay, but entered, with three men.

A large kerosene lamp was affixed to the wall, and this lamp Gordon immediately lit.

"Come, boys, time to get up," the sport exclaimed; "h'ist yourselves out of these bunks! Lively now! Roll out, tumble out—any way to get out!"

Great was the astonishment of the inmates when, opening their eyes, they discovered that they were practically prisoners.

There were only five workmen, so, of course, for them to offer resistance would be the height of folly.

"I will have to trouble you to give up your weapons. Do not be alarmed, though, for no harm is intended you; you are simply workmen here, and it can't make any difference who runs the mine as far as you are concerned!"

This was the truth, as the men knew, so they resigned themselves to their fate with a good grace.

The sport then went for Jack La Mothe. It was not so easy to get at him, for he had his doors locked, but, posting his men

in hiding-places near the house front, Gordon took up a position behind a coal shanty about thirty feet from the residence door.

This was followed by action, and with both revolvers the sport opened fire on La Mothe's headquarters.

Four men who were guarding the house in the rear were instructed to fire from their position, putting their bullets all over the house; the rest were told to go for the keyhole, and that important point was shattered for about a foot in diameter.

The door now swung open, exposing the inner apartment, showing that a coal-oil lamp was burning in there, but turned down low, so as to afford but little light.

"Now, then, Mr. Jack La Mothe, if you are in command of this Golden Elephant mine, I would like to speak a few words with you, if you haven't any objection," Gordon called out from the coal-box, being careful to keep well under cover.

The answer was a revolver shot, which passed within six inches of the other's head.

"Oh, come, now, it is bad policy to try a move of that sort in a game of this sort, for we are no little gang who have sneaked in. On the contrary, we've captured every one of your men, and now hold the mine as securely as a bug in a rug; so any idea of yours that you will be able to get out will only lead to useless bloodshed."

"Oh, no, I reckon you are not giving it to me straight just now."

"I reckon we are. How are you off for provisions?"

"We've got enough to run the mine for a month."

"Including water?"

Then there was a dead silence. The well was just inside of the second barricade and in possession of the attacking party!

"You haven't got water," Gordon exclaimed, and you can't stand much of a siege on that account.

"Of course you can stay in the house and hold possession of it, but in the course of time we will have you out."

"You can bet your life it won't be until morning is on good and strong."

"Suit yourself in regard to that, and I will not complain."

"It will not be the first time that this 'army' has taken a bunk down in the open air," Gordon declared, "and thought themselves the better for it."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CONSULTATION.

The first thing that Jack La Mothe did, when he got through with his interview with the sport, was to prepare to shoot out the light of the coal-oil lamp, but one of the miners who had been through this sort of thing was wise enough to prevent him.

He caught his arm.

"For Heaven's sake, man, what are you about? Do you want to deliver us bound hand and foot into their hands?"

"In the darkness they would make a rush and our hash would be settled."

"The capture of the well did us up for good and all, for without water we can't make a fight."

"All right," said Jack. "I suppose we'll have to give up."

Then he turned to Gordon.

"I reckon you've got the best of us on this deal, and since we don't stand any show for a square fight, we might as well give up."

"You are correct about that," Gordon returned. "You stand no show at all."

"We will hold on until morning, though, before we surrender," the besieged man declared.

"All right; that'll suit us," Gordon assured.

So both parties went in to make themselves comfortable for the night, and the morning light found the contestants prepared to exchange positions.

"Well, I didn't get much satisfaction out of the thing," Jack La Mothe declared, "and I reckon my syndicate has got the best claim to the mine, too." Then he departed with his men.

Gordon found the house full of provisions, and under the circumstances did not hesitate to use them, as it was common to do so in such situations.

About nine o'clock the old receiver of the mine, Robert Manchester, made his appearance.

"I thought I would come down and see how you were getting along. Of course, I heard all the particulars of how your bold dash carried the mine. Up in the town they regard it as one of the smartest things that has ever taken place in the camp."

"When a man goes in for a game of this sort, I believe in making it as red-hot as possible," the sport replied.

"The first thing was to get possession of the mine. We have got it. The key-point is really the well down at the second barricade."

"Now, then, preparations must be made to have the fight around that well, and that is just exactly what I shall do; but I want you, Manchester, to post me in regard to all the legal points about this case, so that we will know precisely how we stand."

"I'll do that in a few moments," and Manchester helped himself to a chair.

"You see, the quicker I discover just what sort of a man I'm going to have against me, the better I can determine what kind of a battle I've got to give," the sport explained.

"The property is in the hands of the law. It will be sold to-morrow morning, and whoever buys that property is the man you've got to fight."

"Ah, yes, I see. Then, in reality, we haven't got any right to it at all."

"None at all; but, as Jack La Mothe had seized upon a chance to make a thousand dollars or so, I thought it a shame that we couldn't take the trick out of his hands, particularly as we had more right to the mine than he had," and the wily old speculator grinned as he made the confession.

"It was a smart piece of business," the sport remarked, with a laugh. "We have made a thousand or so less expenses, anyway."

"Yes, and the other parties are out a hundred or two, but you mustn't speculate if you are not prepared to lose money."

"Very true. What is the next move, for I don't expect that you've gone into this thing to stop here."

"Oh, no; the mine is well worth about twenty thousand dollars. How are you situated?"

"Not well enough to go into any big speculation of the kind."

"It would need about ten thousand dollars."

"I can't raise that."

"I can. The chances are about a thousand to one that no one else in this neighborhood can put up such an amount of cash."

"From what I have seen of the camp I should judge that ten thousand dollars was a pretty large amount, particularly as the great majority of the people do not believe that the property is worth any such sum," Gordon remarked.

"That's the point. That's where I have the advantage, being on the inside for so long."

"When a mine is worth twenty thousand dollars and improving, there is always the chance that she will go up to thirty or forty thousand—possibly to fifty or sixty."

"Good!" the sport ejaculated. "If we win it will bring me in a pretty big thing, and if we lose I can't be hurt for much."

"But, I say, Manchester, one thing about this affair puzzles me, and that is your conduct with this Miss Underwood. You don't seem to be the sort of man to fall desperately in love with any young woman."

The receiver put on a wise look; then he caressed his beard with his hand for a few moments, and laughing, said:

"My dear fellow, I'm afraid I'll have to admit that you have hit off my character correctly, and I would not care for Miss Underwood if I did not see a chance

to make a big stake out of her. True, I am running the risk that the lady may not like me, but I am willing to stand my luck on that."

"I don't see why she shouldn't be willing to become your wife. You are a trifle older than she, but she is all alone, without a friend in the world to turn to," Gordon argued.

"I think I can work the game," Manchester responded.

"And now in regard to yourself," the receiver added. "I don't judge that you are the kind of a man to care to be tied down to a mine?"

"No, I am not," Gordon declared, frankly. "One man is enough for a little mining property like this, to my thinking. Give me a few shares of the stock, and a certain amount of cash, and I will be satisfied."

The receiver immediately shook hands with the sport.

"I thank you sincerely for the generosity with which you have acted."

"Oh! that's all right," the sport assured. "I always try to do the square thing in all business matters."

"Well, I think the business is understood now," the receiver remarked, as he rose to depart. "You will not see me again until after the auction."

Manchester walked down through the gulch, accompanied by Gordon.

"I will pitch into my defenses here right away, so you can depend upon my holding the fort until the legal ceremonies are over."

"Yes, you want to keep your eyes open, the other fellows will be after you, I surmise."

The receiver passed out of the gulch, and with a wave of his hand started for the town.

Gordon watched him for a few minutes.

"That's a foxy old chap. What he don't know about the art of handling mines is not worth knowing."

Then Gordon returned to supervise the construction of the barricade running clear across the gulch, from wall to wall, so that it would not be possible for any one on the outside to get to the inside without the knowledge of one of the defenders.

While engaged in this work he received a message that a man desired to see him at the lower picket.

Gordon's command was to stop everybody there, for he did not intend to allow any one to see how he was fortifying the lower pass.

Upon arriving at the vidette he found the party was the president of the Law and Order League.

"Ah, my dear Mr. Gordon!" the gentleman exclaimed, extending his hand, and shaking the other's in the warmest manner.

"Delighted to see you, Mr. Parker," returned the sport.

"I come on business," whispered the caller hurriedly. "I belong to a syndicate. We will give you five thousand dollars, cash, if you will turn this mine over to us!"

"Couldn't think of it! It's in the hands of the law, and will be sold at auction to-morrow, to the highest bidder. Come to the sale, put up your cash and buy."

And the sport turned his back on Parker.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A WESTERN AUCTION.

Apart from the arrival of a circus, a dramatic troupe with a big brass band, or the announcement that a couple of factions are going to fight their differences out in the main street of a thriving camp, nothing will create more excitement than the calling of an auction.

Nor does it matter much what the man has to sell, for the moment he announces an article or two to dispose of to the highest bidder, fifty or a hundred of his fellow citizens will respond to the call.

"Tall oaks from little acorns grow." From one article grows the auction.

On the morning the Golden Elephant mine was announced for disposal at legal sale, quite a crowd gathered, a hun-

dred and fifty to two hundred people, and as the saloons were liberally patronized from the beginning, it seemed likely that there would be trouble.

This became a certainty when ten men from the North, from the Black Giant ranch, came down and encountered eight men from the Lost Glove mine, who prided themselves upon their fighting ability.

The sale of the mine was called at ten o'clock, but, like all such legal affairs, it did not get under way until about eleven.

In the interim, cows, horses, mules and wagons were sold, or rather attempted to be sold, the financial conditions being so bad that nobody wanted to give anything for the animals or things offered.

This made the outsiders mad, and a big bullwhacker from Fort Benham called out:

"Have you fellers in Sulphur Bar got so far ahead of your neighbors that you think they ought to give you all their stuff?"

"Sulphur Bar is a right smart place," a cowboy declared, shaking his fist in the air.

"Tain't so! It's a mighty mean place," a sheep-man declared; "only fit for a hog to wallow in."

Then there was a fight—a free for all—immediately. Whoever started it—who struck the first blow, no one was able to say.

The town marshal, with a special corps of ten men, was on the lookout for just such a rumpus; so the fighters were speedily separated before they could do each other much damage.

"None of that, gentlemen. We won't have it! If you want to kill each other, get out of Sulphur Bar."

The legal sale, which must take place in the center of the town, was at once hurried up.

Concisely the proper legal functionary described the Golden Elephant property, and solicited a bid.

"How much of this bid must be cash?" Captain Jack La Mothe asked.

"All of it," the auctioneer replied.

Whereat the probable bidders looked a little disappointed, although they did not regard the property as being worth a big sum in the condition in which it was.

"We might as well settle this thing at once," Manchester said to Gordon, who stood by his side.

The sport nodded assent.

"I will give you twenty thousand dollars cash for the property," the ex-receiver declared.

The other bidders looked at each other in disgust.

"He's got it safe enough," Jack La Mothe remarked to a gang by which he was surrounded.

"The mine must be worth a devilish sight more than we have any idea of, or else he would never have dared to make such an offer.

The Government officials were amazed, for none of them who were well acquainted with the mine believed it would fetch over fifteen thousand.

The auctioneer made the usual bluffs about would any one else give him any more than twenty thousand; but nobody, apparently, was anxious to do it, and so the Golden Elephant was knocked down to the Miss Frances Underwood syndicate.

This circumstance occasioned an astonishing amount of surprise, for, as the sister had made no particular move after the suicide of her discouraged brother it was generally supposed she had no money, so she had been accorded but little recognition by the denizens of Sulphur Bar.

But, presto, change! The orphan girl, friendless and alone in the hotel, now the member of a syndicate able to put up a cash payment of twenty thousand dollars.

Ah! that was a signal for a general obeisance; so there were few women in Sulphur Bar who did not consider it their duty to call upon her and show her attention.

Manchester at once rose to be a "big

gun," and as for the sport, he was the biggest warrior who had ever breathed the breath of life in this or any other country.

The most delighted people in regard to the affair were the honest Dutchman, Jake Hoffman, the landlord of the hotel, and his wife.

"Ah, mine tear friend Mr. Gordon! I knew that you would make der trick v'en you vent into it," and then, in a mysterious way, he beckoned the sport to follow him into the private room of his wife.

The woman appeared to be equally as anxious, following in the rear.

"How vas it mit you und der receiver? You must get a fair price out of him, eh?"

"Oh, yes; he has made a fair bargain with me."

"You understand, my tear friend, the game this man has played. He is square, I s'pose. It is the duty of every man to look out for himself. D'is girl owned d'ot mine; as receiver, he made that discovery. She was going to be robbed of it by somebody because she couldn't put up money enough herself to save it from der sharks, und he made up his mind to take it himself, making the thing goot mit his conscience by marrying her, eh?"

"Well, when you come to think of the condition of the girl, it wasn't so bad a deal for her."

"Oh, no; d'ot vas all right, und she has probably got as goot a husband as d'ot average vomens."

"Yes, I was rather puzzled myself to know why he was making so strong a fight in behalf of a woman who lost her claim to the mine the moment the auction sale took place!"

"He has got the thing fixed now so d'ot he was safe no matter v'ot turns up; if the court declares the auction sale all right, he vas all rigdt; but if der law states d'ot der auction sale was wrong, und it had no business to sell Miss Underwood's property, then he is all right again, for he is Miss Underwood's husband. Good arrangements."

"Und who better can take care of a lady's property than der lady's husband?" and the Dutchman chuckled at the successful manner in which the scheme had been worked.

"Exactly, and as everybody is suited all round I don't think any one has a right to complain, except, maybe, the men who didn't have cash enough to buy the mine."

"Oh, d'ot ish all right, too. Nobody wanted anybody but Miss Underwood to have her rights in t'e mine secured. Now, d'ot is done, and everypody ish much obliged to you, Mister Gordon, I'm sure of d'ot!"

"Let us celebrate d'ot victory now in a schooner of my best beer, eh?"

The sport smilingly assented. They descended to the bar-room, took a table and sat down to enjoy their beer in the German style.

They opened the beer, pledged themselves in the good old Fatherland fashion, took a bite at the fried cakes which the careful German housewife furnished, and then a long swig at the yellow foaming liquid.

As they reset the glasses upon the table, an odd sort of a character came into the room, and halted in the center of the apartment.

He was a young man, dressed as an ordinary miner, and, as neither the sport nor the landlord had seen him before, they did not think it necessary to pay any attention to him.

The young fellow, looking about for a moment, walked up to the bar and leaned upon it.

"V'at vill you hafe?" asked the polite bartender.

"How would a fried monkey go?" questioned the miner, with a grin.

"A fried monkey would not go at all, and you don't want to come mit my place and talk to me mit such nonsense!" cried the German.

"Oh, I don't, don't I? You're going to try and run the whole town, eh, Dutchy?" responded the miner, in an ugly way.

"No, ve don't want to run anybody's place but our own," answered the bar-

man; "but you want to understand rightt away d'ot if you come in here und talk fried monkeys, I vill take a club und mit it break your head as quick as never vas."

Both Jake and his assistant were stout fellows, and allowed no one to impose on them. They had clubs, knives and revolvers, and knew well how to use them.

"Oho! you're a cranky sort of a bar-keeper!" the miner exclaimed. "I didn't say that I wanted fried monkeys. It was merely a suggestion on my part, such as might pass from one gen'leman to another gen'leman, but I reckon thar' ain't much of a gen'leman about you, anyhow."

"Say! I tells you, mine goot friend, shust v'at you'd better do," and the bartender, leaning over the counter, addressed the miner in a confidential manner; "shust you take two or three runs around der block mit those gentlemen of yours, und maybe you'll feel better."

"What's that? Do you dare to insult a free-born, white American citizen?" exclaimed the miner, flourishing his fists in the air.

"I insult any mans v'ot comes around me mit fool talk about fried monkeys. V'at you takes me to be? A double-barrel jackass, eh?"

The miner drew his revolver immediately, but the young Dutchman had him "covered" with an enormous club, so it was plain that before the customer could use his weapon, the barkeeper could knock him senseless.

The host and the sport thought it was about time for them to interfere. Gordon seized the miner and Hoffman the barkeeper.

CHAPTER XXV.

A QUEER ERRAND.

"Now, there isn't the least use of trouble!" Gordon protested, as he deftly removed the revolver from the hand of the miner, and, uncocking it, shoved the weapon back in its holster.

"Yas, yas. Johannes, you must not be too quick mit der club. This gentleman vas a goot-natured mans; he comes to hafe a social time mit us; he does not come to kill either you or I; hey, is d'ot not so?" to the young miner.

"Of course," the young fellow assented, eager to get out of the first-class fight on his hands; "and I would be pleased to have you three take a drink with me, 'cos' the Lord knows I don't harbor no malice 'gainst nobody."

The barkeeper pushed forward a bottle and three glasses.

"There you are, gents, as goot whisky as you can find mit all Utah!"

All bowed to each other, and swallowed the fluid.

"You see, boys, I am one of the most peaceable fellers in the world, excepting that, maybe, I git a little too fresh sometimes with my fried-monkey business; but I am only struck that way once in a while. I came here on a level piece of business. I want to see Mr. Harry Gordon."

"No trouble about that," the sport responded. "That is my handle."

"You don't mean that you're the man that's been knocking them round, right and left, in this yere camp?" the other exclaimed, in profound astonishment.

"I am the man."

"Well, I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't got it straight from you. Why, a man to be a champion boxer ought to be about twice as big as you are; but Mr. Gordon, there is no mistake about your ability in the boxing line, and so, as I want to learn to be a boxer, I have come to you to get a few lessons."

Gordon was taken completely by surprise. He had, during his varied career, been asked to do almost anything, but never had been requested to set up as a teacher of boxing.

"Well, I don't know about that," he said. "I may be able to box, yet may not be cunning enough in the manly art of self-defense to instruct anybody else. But I will do my best to teach you, if you really wish me to do so."

"Yes, I do. You see, there's a lot of fellers down in our camp that are making

faces at me, and I know I'm strong enough and big enough to get away with them if I only knew how to do it. But when the other fellers have got all the science, and I haven't got any, I don't stand much chance."

"No, you certainly do not," Gordon replied.

"Well, now, I want the science, and I can afford to pay a dollar a lesson of but an hour each if you could put 'em up at that rate."

"I think I can do it."

"Und I hafe got shust der room to suit you," Hoffman declared. "It's a large, light, close shed, this side of the corral. I had it built for some Englishmen who were afraid their wagons would be stolen. I vill show you der place," and the landlord led the way.

The sight of the three marching down the street attracted considerable attention, as Jake noticed.

"Mine gootness, I never thought!" he exclaimed. "If we three go into this shed the town will be sure that we go there to fight, und d'ot vill not do," so, assuming his most beaming smile, the Dutchman said:

"One of these gentlemen is going to give the other a boxing lesson, und if you would like to come und see der fun, you are quite welcome."

The crowd came forward on the double quick, and when all were within the shed, the host placed himself as a warden beside the door.

"By the way, I suppose I ought to introduce myself," the new-comer now said to his teacher. "My name is Whistler, and I'm from Virgin City. Folks who know me crack me up to be a pretty good sort of a chap."

The sport bowed, saying that he was glad to make the acquaintance of Mr. Whistler.

"Now, then, come into position."

And the position into which the young man did come was absurd in the extreme, for both hands were out of line, and neither one guarded the body.

"You are ready for an attack, now?" the sport asked.

"Yes, I'm on guard."

"Well, Mr. Whistler, I'll show you that you are not guarded at all, thus:

"I make, apparently, a severe stroke at your head; up go both of your hands to guard, leaving your chest and waist uncovered. Out goes my left, which, lighting just above your heart, would demoralize you for a good five minutes."

The sport then merely pushed the young man, but it was sufficient to send him over on the flat of his back, for he was totally unprepared for such an attack.

He raised himself on his elbow and gazed at the man who had brought him low so easily.

"Great Scott! This here is about as surprising a thing as I ever run up against!"

"I had no more idea of getting a blow in that direction than of butting up against a steam engine."

"That is just it; the science of boxing teaches us surprising things."

And the sport extended his hand and helped Whistler to his feet again.

"Will you have any more?" Gordon asked politely.

"Oh, yes. I'll try another round, although I'm beginning to get the idea that I don't know the least blamed thing about it."

"Well, you certainly might have a deal more knowledge, without being troubled to carry it around."

The sport assumed a guard again.

"Now, then, come up to the scratch."

The young man did so, but reluctantly.

"You're all right now as far as the chest is concerned, but all wrong as to all other parts of the body."

"Where are you going to hit me this time?" the young fellow asked, at which everybody in the shed roared.

For answer the sport sparred away as before; then out came the right wrist, the same as in the first round; a feint with the left, and—

It was a knock-out on the jaw-bone this time!

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LESSON.

The stroke was a light one, but as the man had his heels clumsily placed together he went over on his back again.

The bystanders chuckled, and the teacher hastened to assist the miner to rise, saying as he did so:

"See here, my friend, you don't want to waste your time at anything of this kind, for it is evident you are not in the game at all. You'll never make a boxer; it isn't in you; and the only result will be that you will get punched from the beginning to the end."

"I believe you're right, by hooky! and I'm very much obliged to you for letting me know the truth. There isn't any use of a man getting pounded for nothing."

"D'ot shows d'at your head was screwed on right," the landlord declared. "A man was a fool to go into any game v'ere he was not going to win," and Hoffman led the way to the open air.

The gathering broke up there, and Mr. Whistler was lost sight of by Hoffman and Gordon, who, returning to the hotel, resumed their seats at the table.

"Well, mine tear friend, you hafe wasted a goot half-hour mit d'ot donkey, und, come to think of it, he nefer paid you the dollar, either."

"That's true, but I'll get my dollar's worth out of the amount of blowing he will do in regard to my boxing abilities."

That evening, as Gordon was smoking a cigar after supper out on the porch, Sandy Jones made his appearance.

"How have things been running? I've been out of town for the last week or two with O'Brien. I've had a job up in Virgin City, but as the thing is played out now, we've come back to Sulphur Bar. Will you come in and have a drink? I'm jest rolling in money."

"Thank you, no, Sandy. I am on the wait for my accustomed poker party."

"How would you like to try a hand with me?" asked Sandy. "I don't play so bad a game if I don't have too much liquor aboard."

"Certainly, if you want to get three or four more to make it interesting."

"Oh, I can get them easily enough. We'll go in about nine o'clock in the room up-stairs."

"That will be agreeable," the sport acquiesced.

Then Sandy sauntered away in search of the landlord, to make the arrangement, while Gordon gossiped with his friends as they came along.

At nine precisely Sandy Jones made his appearance.

"All right. I've got them all corralled up-stairs, and I reckon we can have a pretty lively time."

Jones conducted Gordon to the room, where it was not necessary to introduce him, as he was already acquainted with those present, with the exception of Steve O'Brien, Sandy's friend, a big, muscular, yellow-haired man, who looked to be as square as square could be.

There were Maurice Littlefield, the alcalde; Tom Mack, the postmaster, and Moses Oppenheimer, the storekeeper.

It was not a wonder that Sandy got these last three, for they made it a rule to play poker with somebody about every night in the year.

It was a merry, happy game, and the sport, as usual, came out a trifle ahead—just enough to pay him—for poker was his living, and he must win in order to be able to get along.

It was eleven o'clock when the party broke up, and as they were shaking hands with each other, six men came into the room—six big fellows, roughly dressed and a little the worse for liquor.

"Hello! hello!" exclaimed the biggest one of the lot, who possessed a decidedly ruffianly way. "You don't mean to say that ye are through with this here game, are ye?"

"Yes, just got through," responded Gordon.

"Well, I'm blamed sorry to hear it," averred the other. "We've jest come from down-town, where we have been running

the biggest kind of a poker game. No limit! Free to go as you please for everybody."

"If we had known it earlier we might have come in," Gordon said, in his friendly way.

"Why, it ain't too late to start a good game now. There's enough of us, even if some of the gents do want to go home."

"Well, you'll have to excuse me for one, for I've got all the poker playing I want to-night, and I'm going straight home," the sport declared.

"But you're the man we want. You're the champion poker player. You're the feller that's been pulling in the wealth, in a quiet way, ever since you struck the camp, and we want a chance to pull some of it out of you," the stranger persisted, in an ugly mood.

"That is coming out fair and square enough, and no mistake, but that's the way I like men to talk—to come right out with what they mean."

"If you really want me to join you in a poker game to-morrow night, without limit, I'm your man, but not to-night. As I have said, I am through for this evening."

"All right, then; let it be to-morrow night, sport. I'm mighty anxious to test your skill in a game of poker," the other averred.

"My name, by the way, is Warwick—Billy Warwick. I sets myself up to be a first-class gambler, and as good a man at poker as ever sat down to a table in Utah."

"Delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr. Warwick," Gordon responded, shaking hands with the elaborate formality he always employed on such occasions.

"Where will we hold the gathering? Here, in this room?" asked Gordon.

"No my party meet at the regular gambling house, in the center of the village, where we have a nice room in the rear of the saloon."

"Very well; I will be on hand, and don't doubt we will have a pleasant evening."

The party then separated, Gordon, the host, and Sandy Jones proceeding to the bar-room.

"I'm afraid you'll have trouble before you get through with this," Jones observed.

"Little doubt about that," Gordon replied; "the chances are big that this is going to be a fighting poker party."

"What sort of a chap is this Warwick, anyway? Who is he, and what reputation does he bear?"

"It ain't the best in the world," Sandy admitted. "He's a gambler, and has never done anything else since coming to the town. He has been rather inclined to be ugly, too, on several occasions."

"D'ot vas so," Hoffman supplemented. "He is very apt to make von jackass of himself when he gets plenty of liquor on board. He vas not make his headquarters mit me here. Mac O'Hony's Irish Lion Hotel suits him more than my place, for he likes the class of customers he meets there better."

"Well, I'll try him on to-morrow night and see what he is made of; for, as I've got into the thing I can't very well get out, so I'll try to pull through as well as I can."

During the next day Gordon occupied himself in closing up all the affairs of the Golden Elephant mine, and, having done this, he called upon the cobbler to bid good-by to him.

Camp was exceedingly sorry to listen to the word farewell.

"Well, old fellow, I am sorry to lose you, and I can tell you without any flattery, that if you'd stayed here long enough you'd have made a most excellent shoemaker."

"Yes, and do you know, it's an odd thing about the matter: I really took a fancy to the trade, and some day I may be glad enough to come back again."

"But you can understand at present that a man owning a good share in one of the best mines in the district would be ridiculous to bind himself down to a cobbler's bench."

"Oh, yes; but I say, partner, you may happen some time to run across a chance

to get me in, and I don't want you to forget to improve the opportunity."

"You can depend upon my looking after you," the sport assured, heartily.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A GANG OF SHARPS.

Just as the clock struck nine Harry Gordon made his appearance in the saloon of the Irish Lion Hotel.

He had the usual medium-sized revolver at his right side, balanced with a small bowie at his left waist, but made no special show of weapons, which most gamblers exhibit in Wild West camps when they are in for a heavy game.

The proprietor of the Irish Lion Hotel was a good-natured fellow who did his best to make things pass off nicely.

He had two "bouncers" to keep order, and it was but seldom that anybody got ahead of them.

When Gordon entered the gambler, Billy Warwick, greeted him warmly.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Gordon! Allow me to introduce you to some friends of mine who will be delighted to make your acquaintance."

"Mr. Marcus O'Rourke. This gentleman is at the stock-yard, and what he doesn't know about a steer is not worth knowing."

The pair exchanged salutations as usual.

"This is Thomas E. Flanders, who rejoices in possessing the finest pair of red whiskers in this district. Hey, Tom?" and Warwick slapped the other on the back, who responded with a laugh.

"Mr. Flanders is a master bricklayer, and has had a hand in the erection of some of the finest buildings in this camp."

Flanders shook hands with the sport, then stepped aside to allow the next to come up—a nicely-dressed man with an oily look on him.

"Mr. Billy Wilson," Warwick remarked, "who belongs to the great army of speculators, as does also Mr. Harry Leavitt, but you'll find them both gentlemen and worthy of confidence."

"I do not doubt it," the sport returned, with a bow which saluted the whole party.

The whole party at once retired to their private room, cards were brought, and the play commenced.

It was always the sport's custom to venture lightly at first, the idea being to discover just what kind of skill his opponents showed.

Light as were the stakes, the all-around sport seemed to win easily—won so steadily that his victims could not understand how it was that he did so.

It is easy enough to understand that it did not take Gordon long to get on to all the tricks of his opponents, for there really was not a first-class player in the party.

It was a pleasure to him to watch the sly operations and dodges of his antagonists, and then do the trick ever so much better.

Warwick began to get annoyed. Here five men were pitted against one, and yet they had not succeeded in gaining any advantage, although they had not neglected to take every opportunity to catch him unawares.

"My throat is as dry as an ash heap," Warwick at length declared, and as he spoke he tore the pack of cards in two which he had been using, and threw them into a corner.

"I don't like cards figured in that way, anyhow. I don't think they bring luck."

"I rather agree with you myself," the sport asserted, quietly; "but there are times when nothing seems to bring luck. When it comes to that I usually am content to shut my eyes and go it blind."

All were dissatisfied with the state of the play, with the exception of the sport, to whom it had been great fun to beat the thieves at their own game.

Their cards and signals were all old-fashioned, and he read them as easily as though they were printed theater bills on the wall before him.

The boss gambler at last commenced to drink freely.

A dispute then soon arose over the cards, and all were on their feet at the same time.

Warwick was the first to get his revolver out, but before he could use it he was promptly knocked down by the Gold-Button Sport.

This was the signal for a general outbreak, and in the confusion everybody blazed away at everybody else.

The lights were shot out, and a headlong rush was made for the doors and windows.

The attention of the town was attracted by the shooting and the headlong rush from the saloon, and people poured into the street to see what had caused the trouble.

Strange as it would seem, when it is considered how many pistol shots had been fired, but little damage had been done.

The barkeeper had been wounded in the side. He had just entered the room with a round of drinks, when the quarrel began.

Warwick had the tip of one of his ears shot off, and held the sport responsible for this piece of evil doing, but Gordon denied the shooting.

"Still, I am willing to be held accountable for the damage, if you see fit to have it so."

"I will send a friend up to see you tomorrow at the hotel," Warwick said to Gordon, "for I'm going to have satisfaction for this thing if it takes me a year."

"All right. I'm your man, and I had just as lief put you in a condition for planting now as any other time."

"Does this fellow really mean business?" Gordon asked Hoffman, as they took their parting drink together, after the sport's return to his lodgings.

"We had a free fight down there upon our breaking up, and he holds me responsible for the loss of the tip of his ear."

"Yes, sport; the big fellow is inclined to be very ugly when he gets started, and he has a bad gang with him; so you will have to face not one man, but half a dozen."

"That is not a pleasant prospect, and I'll have to get some of my acquaintances together in order to give me a helping hand."

"D'ot is der vay the man yorks his game if he can possibly do so. He always double-banks de other fellow, so as to start in mit der advantage on his side," the host explained.

"I'll keep my eyes open for him, and we'll see if we can't arrange so that each one of us shall get a fair show."

"D'ot vas only der vay it ought to be," the landlord observed, as they parted to retire to bed.

In the morning Gordon arose early, and after breakfast, repaired to the front room, ready to receive visitors.

In a short time the man who claimed to be the leading light of the stock-yard, O'Rourke, put in an appearance.

"I'm quite delighted to see you, Mr. Gordon. I come on behalf of Mr. Warwick, who is indebted to you for the loss of his ear last evening, and he wants satisfaction for the same."

"In that case I am quite prepared to give Mr. Warwick all the satisfaction he requires. What does he want and when does he want it?"

"Just now he is down at the main corral of the town, where there is plenty of room for gentlemen who have reason to be angry with each other to exchange shots."

"Then return, and give my compliments to him, and tell him as soon as I can make the necessary arrangements I will be with him."

"Necessary arrangements?" echoed the other, apparently surprised.

"Yes. I always have some friends, you know, who like to see me go through these little affairs, and when they hear that I'm booked for one they always press a point to be able to be present."

It was plain that the other did not like this way of doing business, but as he could not help himself it was useless to complain. So, with the remark that Warwick would be on hand, he departed.

A few minutes after O'Rourke left Sandy Jones came down the street and entered the hotel.

"Hello, old man!" he exclaimed, to Gor-

don. "I hear that you've got ye'rself into a first-class scrape from what they say up-town."

"Yes, I expect to have a lively old quarrel on my hands, for this fellow seems determined to have my heart's blood. Nothing else will satisfy him, I presume."

"Well, he is a tolerably good man, but I don't reckon it needs a champion of champions to get away with him," was Sandy's conclusion.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FIGHT.

"Is this corral the usual place for settling such difficulties?"

"Yes, there's plenty of room there, and no danger of anybody except the principals getting hurt."

"A very good idea. Do you care to walk up to see the fun?"

"Oh, yes; I never miss a game of this kind, you can depend upon that," Jones replied.

The sport and Jones proceeded up the street side by side, but Sandy, upon looking around and seeing that he was the only man who accompanied Gordon, took alarm at once.

"Here, here! This won't do!" he exclaimed. "Don't you know that this fellow is one of the old double-banking hustlers? Why, sport, he will have five or six men in the background, all ready to jump upon you when you least expect it."

"Don't you be alarmed about that!" Gordon replied. "Hoffman made all the arrangements in regard to that this morning. He has got the men and arranged the trap a deuced sight better than I could."

"It's all right, then. I thought it queer that an old hand like yourself should walk blindly into the snare."

It was about ten minutes' walk to the great corral, and when the pair reached it they found forty or fifty people loafing about, all of them well armed, and several with rifles in their hands.

Warwick was seen at the extreme end of the corral. He had a pair of revolvers, one belted to his waist, the other carried in his hand.

As soon as he saw Gordon he beckoned to him with his revolver, and waved his hand up the road.

The sport nodded assent, but he took a quick glance around in order to see what game the other could play if he complied with this request.

Two or three hundred feet farther on the trail ended, for all evidence of the town vanished, and a little scrubby country began, through which ran a simple, plain road.

The sport went forward for about a hundred yards, then halted.

There was plenty of cover for an assassin, and the all-around sport could not remove from his mind the impression that if he followed the gambler in amongst the shrubbery he would speedily be laid low.

"Oh, no! None of that in mine, thank you!" he exclaimed. "I'll wait here for you. This is a good position; no cover to aid any friend of mine, and you'll have the squarest kind of a show."

"You notice that I've got two friends on that side and two friends on this side."

"Now, then, if you have four friends to meet them, they are prepared to come up to the scratch right lively."

Warwick appeared extremely surprised, for he did have four men back in the bushes, and expected that, after the fight commenced, one of them would get in a shot at the sport without any one being able to detect where it came from.

His game had been detected, so that put an end to that artful dodge.

There were too many people who would be witnesses to the fight for him to be able to force the thing through.

"There is some mistake. I don't want anybody else to fight my battles," he cried, and with the words he whipped out his revolver and took deliberate aim at the sport.

Gordon had his weapons ready. They were self-cocking, and no trouble to handle.

Bang! bang! went both revolvers.

Both the men missed fire. It was a long distance even for extraordinary shots.

"Come on! Another hitch!" Gordon exclaimed; "You can't expect to hit every time."

Warwick was an excellent shot, and it was his intention to advance at every fire until he got the other well within range.

This the next few steps seemed to have accomplished, and, taking careful aim, he fired.

But the shot was a failure.

"Oho! I can't do anything until I am twenty feet nearer in!" he growled, and again started forward.

The sport now did likewise, and then, with wonderful quickness, up went his revolver arm, a tongue of flame shot forth, and Warwick went down, with a bullet in his shoulder.

That shot convinced him that he had got all the fighting he wanted, and when he was carried by his friends off the field he told them that he was satisfied.

Warwick had a bunk up on the hillside with three more sporting men, and when the party reached there some of them expressed surprise at his want of success.

"Well, I don't know exactly what to make of it myself," Warwick declared; "but, somehow, I did not seem able to catch on at any turn."

"Then there suddenly flashed across my mind the stories I'd heard of this man's wonderful skill as a marksman, and, thinks I—here I might as well slide out before I get peppered all up."

"But I will get square with the fellow before he leaves the town, though; he is one of the kind of men whom a man like myself cannot afford to deal with openly and aboveboard."

"I must watch my opportunity to strike him in the dark. He must never be allowed any chance for his life, or else I stand no show for mine."

"I will fix up a job so complete that it cannot fail to snare him, no matter how carefully he may be on the watch."

The others declared their belief that Warwick could do this, for they knew that he was an adept when it came to tricky plans.

Harry Gordon went at once to his headquarters at the hotel, and was greeted on the stoop by German Jake, who waited there anxiously to see how the affair had gone.

"All right," exclaimed the sport, from quite a distance down the road, holding up his hands to show that he had not been injured.

"Aha! D'ot vas goot!" cried the landlord, rubbing his hands briskly together. "I vas as glad of that as though I had received a hundred-dollar bill."

"You are one of der right kind of mans, und v'en you settle mit der town, I am anxious for you to get ahead."

"I know that people in my line of business are not generally looked upon with favor, but since I have become mixed up with the Golden Elephant mine I don't think any one has a right to complain of me."

"No, I reckon not; but we'll soon ascertain about d'ot, as we have a meeting of der board to-morrow night."

Then they separated. Hoffman entered the hotel, while the sport proceeded down the road to the Golden Elephant.

Everything had been doing finely. The fortifications had been strengthened and an armed patrol was kept constantly on guard.

He at once sought out Mr. Manchester, and together they proceeded to the office.

"Let me see. I've got to sign these papers, and that winds up my connection with the Golden Elephant property."

Manchester nodded assent.

The papers were speedily produced, and Gordon affixed his signature to them.

"There, that settles me. Hereafter I'll have to content myself with the pleasant alternative of drawing my share on the stock."

"With the average mine the chances would be big that there wouldn't be 'drawings,' but with the Golden Elephant you are safe for twenty or twenty-five per-

cent. for a couple of years at least, judging by the ore in sight."

"I hope so. Good-by. Take good care of yourself," and Gordon took his way to the town.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A NOVEL PROPOSITION.

The sun was beginning to droop in the heavens.

The sport went leisurely along, musing over his new fortune, when he was aroused by a man hopping into the trail about a hundred yards ahead of him, revolver in hand.

Gordon's revolvers were out in a second, and quickly he flashed his eyes around him, for, as he instantly suspected, danger was there.

Six men surrounded the sport.

He had fallen into a trap.

Each man of the six had his face covered with a loose black mask.

As soon as Gordon discovered the nature of his surroundings—six against one—he replaced the hammers of his revolvers and shoved the weapons back into their holsters.

"Gentlemen, I reckon you have got me this time."

"Yes, I reckon we have. But you have been pretty lucky, and I don't think you have any reason to complain. You'll have to come with us for a little business," and the speaker pointed up the road as he spoke.

"I am agreeable."

The man in the mask started, and Gordon followed in his rear, with the others trooping in behind him.

When the summit of the hill was reached the party left the trail, striking into a small path which led down through a broken country to the southwest.

In five minutes they came to a natural corral among the pines, where seven horses waited for them.

On these they mounted, and rode off at a brisk pace, still heading for the southwest.

In half an hour they pulled rein before a large, old-fashioned ranch, situated in a grove of pines.

No one but a lunatic would ever have located a ranch in such an out-of-the-way place.

It was a beautiful spot after you got to it, had some good grass, and could boast of most magnificent water.

In fact, one little stream ran right from under the cabin itself, but it was so lonely, so far off from everything, that no man stood any chance to make anything out of it running it as a regular ranch.

When they dismounted, the leader, who was a tall, muscular fellow, with a black beard, which the sport surmised was false, approached him and said:

"Gordon, I want to have a little quiet talk with you."

"All right. I am at your service."

"We will walk over to the edge of the grove, where we will be secure from observation," and they started off together.

"By the way, it's an awkward thing," said the masked man, "to converse with a man without a name, so you can call me Jim."

"All right; Jim it is," the sport replied, cheerily.

When the pair reached the edge of the pines they found seats for themselves on the grassy knolls that were almost as soft as velvet.

"Here we are now," exclaimed the man in the mask, "and can discuss our little scheme of battle with as much dignity as two prime ministers in their gilded palaces."

"A scheme of battle, eh?" Gordon repeated.

"Yes, that's what I'm going to propose to you, and it's this Golden Elephant mine business."

Gordon sat upright and indulged in a seemingly hearty laugh.

"Oho, this Golden Elephant mine seems to be possessed of an unquiet spirit."

"It is my belief that a fortune can be pulled out of that property."

"By an outside party?" the sport questioned.

"Yes."

"But that involves another jumping of the mine."

"Exactly."

"Which won't be an easy thing to do."

"No, of course not. If it had been an easy thing a man like yourself would not have been wanted."

"I'm very much obliged to you for the compliment, but I don't know as I'm anxious for the job."

"Why, you accomplished the task before."

"Yes; but under different circumstances. The mine had never been properly fortified."

"Oh, you can do the same thing again," was urged, in a careless way.

"Maybe I can, maybe I can't—and won't."

"But I say, this Golden Elephant business beats me entirely. Here you people talk about taking another man's property and using another man's ore, just as if it was your own. Do you think it right to take the law into your own hands, seize mines to which you have not the shadow of a claim, just the same as the road-agent in the middle of a trail bids his man stand up and deliver?"

"But, go ahead with your explanation; let me see what the chances are, and I'll give you an answer mighty soon."

"Well, it is this way: Manchester, the foxy old lawyer, has worked his scheme mighty fine, but everybody knows that he has robbed somebody. I don't know exactly whom, for that particular mine is one whose title seems to have got lost, and nobody know who owns the thing."

"But I've got a title on which I am going ahead, owned by the man who is on the next property."

"He is going to claim that the surveyor who laid out the lines made a mistake, and did not give him within a hundred feet of the claim to which he was entitled."

"I have bought that claim, which covers a certain part of the Golden Elephant gulch. If it comes in on the lower part it will be apt to hit the well, and whoever hits the well practically owns that property."

"Now, then, what do you say? Will you go in with us, and so bounce the bouncer?"

CHAPTER XXX.

A REVELATION AND A NEW CUSTOMER.

"But, stop a moment, I had forgotten," continued the sport's captor; "I haven't introduced you to the members of our party yet, to show you how strong a force we can collect and the character of those concerned."

"I shall be glad to make their acquaintance," the sport observed, as he looked around on the masked men, who had gradually approached and were now seated in the immediate neighborhood.

"This gentleman has the honor of being the alcalde of the town."

The alcalde arose, bowed, took off his mask, and laughed, as the sport returned the salutation.

"Tom Mack, postmaster, a gentleman whom, I believe, you already know."

Both laughed and bowed.

"Doctor Anderson. Everybody knows the doctor, of course."

The doctor smiled as he removed his face covering and bowed to Gordon.

"And, last, though not least, I hope, myself, Jefferson Parker."

"These two gentlemen here are friends of mine from the East, Hugh Montgomery and Gideon Bedford, who have a few thousand dollars which they want to invest, and they came to the conclusion that some mining speculation of this kind would be as good as anything they could put it into."

"We six control five thousand dollars apiece—thirty thousand dollars; and we thought to put it into a syndicate to obtain possession of the Golden Elephant property."

"Thirty thousand dollars is a good sum," Gordon observed.

"Yes, it is ten thousand more than the other syndicate controlled. Now I ask,

under these circumstances, why in the world can't we do something?"

"The principal reason is that the mine has been so carefully fortified. In the next place, if you depend upon me, I have scruples against going into this second attack."

"Oh, but that is foolish!" Parker protested, in his smooth, oily way.

"The property is practically without an owner. Manchester may claim the ownership for his syndicate; the courts may award it to him, and he may be in possession; but, for all that, he does not really own it any more than I do, and I think I am perfectly justified in having my try for it."

"We will make you a fair offer, Mr. Gordon. We will raise thirty thousand dollars for war expenses and allow you to have the control of the entire sum, in conjunction with myself. You shall enlist the army; no man will be engaged except subject to your approval."

"All the details of the attack and siege shall be subject to you."

"You have made me a flattering proposition, truly, and you must give me time to think it over."

"That is reasonable enough," the leader assented, looking round upon his associates.

They all nodded, for the proposition seemed to be a reasonable one to them.

"Very well, gentlemen; I'll meet you at any time you say to-morrow, and give you an answer."

"Well, say this same time to-morrow. We will drop in and see you at your hotel; that will be the proper place and way to consider what really is a common business proposition."

As they all rose to depart, Parker supplemented:

"And, by the way, Gordon, this is on the strict quiet, you know; not a word about a syndicate with black masks and bronchos. That's a little episode that we threw in for our own amusement."

"Oh, yes. I will be careful, of course. I understand how a man's thoughts run to a little fun of that kind."

The party passed the time away with jokes and laughter as they journeyed back to Sulphur Bar, all in the best of spirits.

Gordon got his supper as usual, and made his way to his accustomed place on the porch, where he waited for "customers."

The sport, however, had hardly made his appearance when Hoffman came hurrying up, full of excitement.

Two coaches had arrived, and the hotel-keeper had been busy receiving the guests.

"Oh, mine friend, I think you will hook one magnificent fish to-night!" the landlord exclaimed.

"He is an Englishman, who calls himself Lord Johmas Tom, or Lord Tom Johmas, or something of d'ot sort."

"You know, mine tear friend, how these Englishmen talk. They run their words all in together so a man cannot make head or tail of what they say; but he is a great poker player. He began to talk about playing poker before he got off the coach."

"He played poker before he was ten years old, he says. He will get up in the middle of the night, now, any time, to play poker."

"Indeed? Then it may not be safe for me to have anything to do with this Briton. He may play poker so well as to be able to clean me out."

"Some of d'ose fellers are goot talkers, but v'en they come to face the scratch they do not produce der fish in der pan."

"Oh, I'll try 'em on, of course. Never a man came to this town yet that I didn't try on."

Gordon was correct in regard to this. As soon as he made the acquaintance of the stranger he turned the conversation to poker playing, finally remarking:

"If it isn't too late for you I wouldn't mind having a little game right off."

"Certainly not; I would be delighted," Lord John Thomas assented.

"As the landlord has a nice little room up-stairs, where, with some hot whiskies,

we can be as comfortable as bugs in rugs."

"That will suit me exactly," the other exclaimed.

The two proceeded up-stairs, and a jolly game the two had.

It was a purely "gentlemen's game," with no suggestion of cheating or foul play of any kind.

But for all that, when they stopped playing at the end of a couple of hours, the sport was fully fifty dollars ahead.

"My goodness!" Lord John had to exclaim. "I've been making a tour of this blooming country for nearly two years, and I must admit that I never was furnished with as good a game of poker as you have dished up for me to-night."

"But now good-night! Hope to see you again!" and he proceeded to his assigned night quarters.

Gordon was about going to his own room, when in came the landlord.

"Beer, eh, my tear friend, Mr. Gordon? Come and have a glass of beer mit me first und I vill dell you somedings which you ought to know."

The sport seated and the beer before them, Hoffman asked:

"How did you come out with this boast-er to-night?"

"About fifty dollars ahead."

"Aha! that is good! But now I tells you that there are two men keeping a secret watch on you."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE WALKING DELEGATES' EXIT.

"Two men watching me?" the sport repeated.

"Yes, mine goot friend, und they're the worst looking pair of chaps d'ot I ever saw," the hotel-keeper declared.

"I noticed them in the early part of the evening—saw that they were watching you, and so I made up my mind to keep my eyes on them."

"When you started to go up mit der town, I got little Jakey, who is der smartest boy as never vas, to follow on you, und he followed mitout anybody knowing anything about it, clear back to my place."

"D'ese two mans are vatching for a chance to kill you."

"All they want is a favorable opportunity, I suppose?" the sport remarked.

"Yes, d'ot vas it; d'ey vant a chance for themselves to get off, und v'en such a chance as d'at comes along d'ey vill be certain to strike at you."

"This is a mighty disagreeable bit of news—the idea of a man being obliged to go around the town with the knowledge that there are two men in the background waiting for an opportunity to kill him on the first convenient occasion."

"Yas, mine gootness; it vas not pleasant!"

"I'll put a stop to it to-morrow, or else I ain't the man I think I am."

And with this declaration the sport went off to his bed.

He was up bright and early in the morning, according to his custom, ate a good and hearty breakfast, then went up to his room and recharged all his weapons.

It was about nine o'clock when he came down-stairs.

He found the landlord standing at one of the corner windows of the bar-room, so as to command a complete view of the town.

"Come here, mine friend, und I vill show you your two men. Do you see those four men over there trading for a mule?"

"Yes."

"D'ot tall, lanky fellow, mit so bad a pair of pantaloons und shirt, und der hat v'at is no goot at all to anybody."

"He is a pretty tough-looking customer. I wouldn't give a nickel for a dozen like him," the sport declared.

"I should think not. Der more one had of such trash as d'ot, the vorse he would be off."

"Vell, he is von of them."

"If you can show me another one anywhere near as bad I'll have to admit that you take the cake here in Sulphur Bar for tough-looking customers."

"I can show you a vorse-looking tramp

immediately," the landlord declared, in his emphatic way. "Just turn your eye a hundred feet up der street; look at der mans sitting on der box."

There, indeed, sat a tough, with red hair and red whiskers, and who wore more dilapidated clothes than the other.

"I give it up; that feller is worse than the first."

"D'ot is v'at I told you. V'at you t'ink, I keep a hotel ten years for nothing?"

"You put der man before me und I tell you pretty mighty quick what he is."

"And you think these two fellows intend to lay me out?"

"Oh, yes; I do not think there is a doubt of it. They have two new revolvers apiece, and fellows of d'ot stamp would nefer be able to get such weapons as dose mitout dey vere had for some bad purpose."

"I'll give them a chance for their bird's-egging within the next few hours, and with such wolves I seldom have any mercy," the sport declared.

"Of course not. V'y should you? Such rascal d'ey should be killed mitout mercy."

"Mein Himmel! Do you suppose d'ot if I vas in your place I would hesitate for a moment to treat such villains just as if d'ey vas vild volves from der prairie?"

"That's correct, I reckon. Now I'll go out and see if I can't have some fun with these fellows," and the sport started for the street.

Hoffman looked after him, and nodded in the most confident manner.

He had so much faith in Gordon that he was sure he could hold his own with a dozen such toughs.

The sport walked up the street with his gaze fixed neither to the right nor left, but straight ahead, as though meditating upon some important object.

The two tramps soon fell in behind, one keeping well behind the other.

They passed through the town, out of the town, and then along the trail leading to the north.

The arrangement was done so skillfully that nobody took any notice of it.

Gordon passed through the rough country where the evergreens and cedars were, and the tramps quickened their pace.

But the sport had also quickened his, and the result was that the pair were astonished when Gordon jumped out from behind an evergreen clump and "held them up" with two revolvers.

"Now, then, my gentle doves, I'll trouble you to shell out your weapons as fast as you are able."

"W'at in the world do you mean by this?" asked the first man, who answered to the name of Billy Back; "you surely don't expect to get any wealth out of me?"

"Nor out of me," chimed in his companion, Charley Cessions.

The second man had added his weapons to the neat pile made by the first.

They were six elegant weapons, four revolvers and two bowie-knives.

"Now, then, I want you to march ten feet and sit down."

"W'at on earth do you want us to play a game of that kind for?" Billy demanded.

"Never mind talking; do it!" and a flourish of the revolvers gave emphasis to the command.

The pair concluded it was best to obey, and while they did so the sport gathered the weapons into a cotton bag which he had brought with him.

The tramps were more and more astonished.

"Now, then, I'm coming right down to business. I have got the dead wood on you, and if you don't speak the truth I will kill you with as little mercy as though you were a pair of wolves."

The tramps looked at each other in great alarm, for they well understood he would be as good as his word.

"I am getting tired of being attacked from every other bush, and I propose to put a stop to it, so I intend to make you tell me who it is that is setting you on to attack me."

And the sport emphasized his remarks by leveling the pistol.

"Now, then, who is it that has em-

ployed you to kill me?" Gordon demanded.

"I don't suppose you'll believe us, but I'll be blamed if I'm able to tell you," answered one.

The sport looked at the pair and shook his head; he thought they were guying him.

"It is the truth, and I'll tell you just how it is. I got out of a job the day before yesterday and happened to mention in Paddy Flynn's concert hall that I was out of work, and I didn't know when I'd get another stroke to do to get whisky and grub.

"That night, about ten o'clock, a little, weeney fellow, pretty poorly dressed, touched me on the arm and got me to go outside with him.

"If you're ripe for a job and ain't particular what it is, I think I can get you one."

"All right; I'm your man," I said.

"Then the cuss explained that he had it in for you, and wanted you laid out in a quiet way.

"I saw that the job could not be done by one man, or at least not by such a man as I am, for I ain't reckoning to get my neck stretched without some chance for my life; so I told him that I wouldn't try it without a partner."

"And he assented to the partner?" the sport asked.

"Oh, yes; he admitted that the job would be a difficult one, and that I could not have too much help."

"How much did he think the thing was worth?" Gordon asked.

"He left that a good deal to me—said the thing ought to be covered by a sliding scale—that it might be worth more and it might be worth less."

"He had confidence that I wouldn't stick him, and we could settle the price after the thing was done."

"And you were to have mutual confidence in him, too?"

"Exactly so; that seemed necessary. And we were to have two new revolvers and a new bowie-knife apiece," the man explained, "which were promptly furnished.

"Also ten dollars for expenses, so that we could wait until we got the right chance to strike a dead sure blow at you."

"Well, there is no mistaking the fact that this party was 'in it' bigger than a wolf," the sport remarked.

"Yes; it was understood that money was no object; all that was wanted was that you should be done for in dead sure shape."

The sport laughed in a sardonic way.

"I am anxious to know who engineered the thing, but it is plain that the chief rascal was cunning enough to fix matters so that his tools could not betray him," and his revolver moved menacingly.

"But we are to meet him for a final settlement outside of Paddy Flynn's on the night of your death," one explained.

"Oh, he is! Then that will do. I will try to keep that appointment."

"Now, my dear cut-throats, it has occurred to me that the walking is exceedingly good to the North, and you had better start in that direction."

The tramps were on their feet and on their way in a twinkling.

Gordon followed closely at their heels.

"Understand that this thing is for good," the sport remarked. "You are never to be seen, either one of you, in Sulphur Bar again during the period of your natural life, or I shall kill you on sight without mercy."

"You bet yer sweet life I don't want no more of yer blamed town. I have been frightened out of about a year's growth now," averred one.

"The same with me," the other echoed.

The sport came to a halt, and watched them until they disappeared in the distance. Now, then, I must look after this mysterious party that haunts Paddy Flynn's tent."

CHAPTER XXXII.

WORKING IN DISGUISE.

As the sport went on his way to the hotel he meditated upon the situation.

"This is about as difficult a task as I

ever undertook. These rascals are not to see the villains who hired them to kill me until after the job is done.

"So as long as I remain in the place I don't stand much chance to get a view of their countenances.

"The fellows will not hang around the concert hall for the sake of getting news, for the death of a man like myself will travel quickly.

"So they will know enough to keep away from the dangerous locality until the deed is done.

"Therefore, there's no use for me to loiter in the neighborhood."

By this time the sport had reached the hotel and found Sandy Jones awaiting him.

"I've got some news for yer," informed Sandy.

"Come off into the corner here," said the sport, as he led the way to the end of the porch, where were a couple of chairs, and these the pair took.

"I've been putting in a good day's work, up at Paddy Flynn's concert hall," Sandy explained. "I ran across an old friend who had got a good job up there, and of course nothing would do but I must stay with him for a while."

"Natural, under the circumstances," Gordon observed.

"I'm one of the handy chaps about a place, you know, who makes himself useful, and at the end of an hour the entire force at Paddy Flynn's were ready to swear by me, and I was perfectly welcome to come there whenever I wanted an evening's amusement.

"Of course, while I was helping these fellows with their work, they talked, and sometimes talked carelessly, and so I soon arrived at the conclusion that there are two of the performers who do not bear you any good-will."

"I am not surprised. I have had some such suspicion myself for quite a time."

"The two I mean belong to a little sort of club that meets in a cabin up on the hillside. I think it is a gambling club which they want to keep quiet among themselves," Sandy explained.

"It is one of those places, you understand," he continued, "where, if they once get a man in, and get him started into playing, they generally contrive to get all his money before he escapes."

"It would be a good scheme for me, Sandy, to disguise myself as a tenderfoot and secure an entrance into the cabin. Possibly I might be able to pull off a good trick. What say?"

"I should not be surprised," Jones assented. "I don't believe there'll be a doubt about their letting me in, and, through me, you can probably get in without any trouble."

"And now here's another scheme we can work," intimated the sport. "If we gain admission, all right; we can have the announcement made, coming from the lower town, that I have been killed."

This struck Sandy as being a most excellent idea.

"That is a splendid notion," he declared.

"Yes, we must get some good men who will tell the story, so that no one will doubt it; then these parties who are working in the dark will be pretty sure to come forward."

"We can but try it," Sandy concluded.

"Yes, we can but try it on, but I fancy its going to be a very hard job," and the sport arose.

"Will you come in and have some supper with me?"

"Don't care if I do?" Sandy assented.

After the meal Jones took a seat on the piazza, while Gordon went off to hunt up a tramp disguise.

Through the aid of the landlord he had no difficulty in getting this.

Sandy took one look at his pard; then he shook his head.

"See here; I never can walk through the camp with you. No one would ever look at me again. I'll meet you at Paddy Flynn's concert hall."

"All right," responded the disguised wanderer.

But it was after eleven o'clock before the tramp entered the concert hall.

He had not wasted his time, however, for he had kept a close watch upon all who entered the place.

He had discovered that there were five people who were on intimate terms—a little band of sharks, some of whose members went down the town and enticed victims to the concert hall, where the other two robbed them.

And one of this band of sharks was a woman disguised as a man!

"That's the small, lean fellow, who has been putting up the money so cheerfully to encompass my death," the sport decided.

Another discovery Gordon made—that he was got up entirely too roughly, for everybody looked upon him with suspicion.

"I must change this a little, for it is my game not to attract any attention."

So the sport retired into the darkness and divested himself of his outward covering of rags.

Then he was dressed in the common miner fashion, boots, breeches, and flannel shirt, and a small slouch hat. As he returned to the circle of light which came from the tent, he encountered Sandy Jones, and the two entered the place in company.

The sport explained what he had discovered.

"Does that indicate that the boss of the concert hall has anything to do with the attacks on you?" Jones asked.

"Oh, no, he has nothing to do with it. The woman is one of the performers here; one of the men likewise, and they are using this place as a convenience, that is all."

The pair remained in the place for half an hour, but did not succeed in picking up any more information.

"The trap to-morrow night may catch some one," the sport declared.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN ACUTE BUSINESS MAN.

As already stated, the Golden Elephant property had no office in Sulphur Bar; all its business was transacted on its own premises.

Aware of this fact, Gordon got a broncho and rode out to the mine, to find an important change—namely, at the entrance, by the main trail, there had been constructed a substantial little office.

In this office now sat Manchester, engaged at his books and papers.

The sport rode up, dismounted, fastened the broncho, and, entering the little room, at once made known the object of his call.

"I thought I had got all through with the Golden Elephant," he announced, "but some men in Sulphur Bar would like me still to take an interest in it."

Manchester looked puzzled.

"Well, you have an interest in it now, as far as owning shares in the stock goes."

"Ah, yes; but these parties are anxious to have me take a very much greater interest in it than that."

"I can't for the life of me see how they are going to work it."

"I'll come out frankly and tell you the whole scheme."

"There are certain parties in Sulphur Bar who think you've got no right to this mine."

"Oh, yes, that is always the way," and the lawyer laughed. "After a syndicate has fought and won a place, there always plenty ready to declare that it hasn't any right to it, particularly in the case of a mine like this, where the ore is rich with free gold, and it is an easy matter to turn it into cash almost immediately."

"That's the secret of the thing, of course," Gordon assented; "but these parties have fished up a title which they pretend antedates the auction sale and all the rest, so their idea is that the property should come directly to them without any regard to what has been done."

"Well, upon my word, I must say this is the cutest piece of trickery that has ever come to my knowledge; but, for all that, I don't believe they'll go into a court of law and fight me on such a claim."

"That isn't the game they intend to

play. They know very well that, in a legal fight, they stand no chance."

"Then there's only one other move for them to try," Manchester observed, with a sideways glance at the sport's face.

"The way by which you got possession, and the way the man ahead of you got hold of the property," Gordon announced.

"But, thanks to the efficient manner in which you planned the new defenses, I don't think anybody will try that game again."

"Well, I had an idea of that kind myself, but there are people in Sulphur Bar who think differently, and they are willing to put up thirty thousand dollars to back their opinion."

Manchester looked surprised and incredulous.

"Oh, I mean it; it is the truth. I wouldn't come here to bother you with any cock and bull story."

"The fact of the matter is," the Gold-Button Sport continued, with a smile, "these parties have a notion that my aid is very essential to the success of their scheme, and so they were anxious to get me to go into it."

Manchester looked annoyed.

"But, I say, old fellow, I don't think that's the square kind of thing, is it?"

He did not answer to this, but remarked:

"I suppose the game is to offer you money enough to cover all your investments and a large bonus besides."

"Yes, that is their proposition; but I told them frankly that I did not think it possible for any body of men to capture that mine, either by surprise or by attack."

"Of course, by a siege of a month or two the work might be done, but then, that would give time for the Government to interfere, which would upset all their calculations."

"You have certainly arrived at a correct conclusion," Manchester acknowledged.

"Come out and take a look over the place and see for yourself how strongly you have made the defenses."

The sport did so, and at the conclusion of the tour had to admit that he did not think it possible for the works to be captured by an attacking force numbering fully five hundred men.

"It was rather odd, your coming direct to me about this matter," the old lawyer stated.

"Oh, well, that is my way of doing things. I'm under no bonds for good behavior to them, that is certain, and if I explain the situation to you that is also my way of doing business—doing it to please myself, you see."

"Well, take care of yourself, Manchester," he added; "I'll be off. I reckon our property is not in any particular danger," and the caller mounted his broncho and started for the town.

The trail was, as we have stated, a lonely one, and the sport encountered few travelers on the way, but, at a turn of the road, where the little clumps of timber appeared, a surprise awaited him.

As he came around the turn three men sprang upon him.

There was no "hold up ye'r hands!" business, but the assailants seized him without warning, dragged him from the saddle, removed his weapons, and bound his wrists tightly together.

Then they carried him a good half-mile back from the trail, so that any shouts for assistance would not be heard.

It was a nice grassy spot in which his captors deposited their prisoner.

The three were powerful-looking fellows, roughly dressed, and thoroughly armed.

Having deposited the sport under the evergreens, they took seats around him.

Each surveyed the other with curiosity.

"Well, we've succeeded in doing the trick this time without any trouble," the leader observed, with real satisfaction.

"This here gentleman ain't no slouch, you know, but is Harry Gordon, the Gold-Button Sport, who bears the reputation of being the best all-arounder there is in this here district."

"And now we have got him, the big chief, safe and sound," and the captain rubbed his hands and beamed his delight.

"I don't see anything to brag about—for three men to jump out and seize a

third man passing peaceably by, unconscious of danger, ain't much of a trick," the sport observed.

"It's the biggest kind of a trick for any man to capture you, that's my opinion," the other averred.

"Much obliged for the compliment, but I'd a heap sight rather you'd applied it to somebody else," was the retort.

"It's very difficult, sometimes, to exactly suit everybody in this world," the road-ruffian returned, with the air of a philosopher, "but I always calculate to work my own plan when I have to."

"Now, sport, I'll tell ye—this is jist how it stands," the fellow explained. "Here be three of us who have always been considered pretty good ones, suddenly lost our jobs, and, blame the luck, not a thing could we find to do. So I jist had to hatch up some scheme to make some ducats. See?"

"That was natural, under the circumstances," Gordon admitted.

"The plan I hit on was as simple as A B C. We would come to some town like Sulphur Bar, search out a man who had plenty of the ready, then watch our opportunity to pounce down upon that same individual and carry him off for ransom."

"Oh, that's the riddle, is it?" exclaimed the prisoner. "And about how much do you consider me worth at auction sale?"

"Your presence and company is worth just about two hundred dollars to us, Mister Sport," asserted the spokesman. "Two hundred, and not a dollar less."

"Now, then, you must write a note to your banker at Sulphur Bar, relating all the circumstances of this little drop down, and tell him that it is necessary that two hundred dollars in cash be sent before you can be released."

Gordon, as we have discovered, was one of those who made the best of all situations and circumstances—who never fought fate with a club when a handshake would be better.

He was in a trap, and he saw no way to get out but by acceding to the ruffian's demands.

"Well, boys, you've got me foul, that is certain, and the easiest way for me to get out of the scrape is to put up the money."

"You are hitting the bull's-eye this time," the leader declared.

"As it happens, I've my check-book with me, so we can fix the business right up."

So he proceeded to fill in a check for two hundred dollars payable to the order of Jake Hoffman; then, at the outlaw's request, he wrote, with pen, ink, and paper, with which they had come provided for that very purpose, a letter to Hoffman explaining what had taken place, and instructing him how to proceed, so as to fully protect the messenger from annoyance or detention.

It may seem strange to the reader to hear the sport's bankers spoken of, but it must be borne in mind that, during his sojourn at Sulphur Bar, Gordon had accumulated over thirty thousand dollars, thanks chiefly to his lucky deal in the Golden Elephant property.

These matters having been arranged to the road-pads' satisfaction, one of the three started immediately for the town, on the sport's broncho.

"You'll have to spend the night under a tree with us; but, with plenty of good whisky, and lots to eat, you won't suffer," the leader of the road-raiders explained.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GOLDEN ELEPHANT WILL NOT DOWN.

The transaction between Harry Gordon and the road-pads was carried out with scrupulous business exactness. The money was paid by Hoffman and no questions asked; the captive was set free, none the worse for his experience.

He rode back to town the next day in good spirits.

"It was a great game," the Dutchman observed. "They von dot two hundred as easy as rolling d'e log off."

"Oh, it's all right!" the sport asserted.

"The riddle was very well worked, but you bet it can't be worked on me a second time."

"The only thing that will put a stop to d'ot business," the landlord averred, "will be d'ot some men will hold d'em up mit a rope one ov these days."

Gordon assented, and then went down the street to the office of Jefferson Parker.

"Mr. Parker, I've been looking into this thing," he said, as he took the chair which the other eagerly placed for him. "I don't really see any chance to make any money out of it."

Parker was disappointed.

"My dear sir, have you made a careful examination?"

"Yes, very careful. As I was to risk my life if I went into it, you can depend upon it I spared no pains in my examination."

"That mine cannot be taken by less than a thousand men; in fact, I don't believe that number could overcome the defenders until they had practically starved them out, for the water supply now is all right and cannot be got at."

"Strange that other experts who have been through two or three affairs of this kind should decide to the contrary," Parker urged.

"I can't help what the other fellows say, and really, you know, I ought to be on the other side. It doesn't seem to be the square thing for me to join in with you against those now in possession."

"My dear sir," responded Parker, in his oiliest way, "you are allowing sentiment to come in contact with business, and you should never permit the two things to come together."

"Possibly not, but I usually do. In this case, however, it is a strict business procedure, I assure you."

"The men who now attack the Golden Elephant mine stand a chance of fifty to one of losing their lives in the attempt, and I'm not anxious for any blood-letting of that sort, thank you."

The sport took his departure, leaving behind him a very wrathful and disappointed man.

Twenty paces down the street he encountered Robert Manchester.

"Just the man I want to see!" Manchester exclaimed, as he grasped Gordon by the shoulder.

"Well, here I am. What is on the carpet now?"

"Let us go into the hotel and get a private room, for I've a pretty serious matter of business to talk over with you."

"I'm agreeable."

The pair were soon seated in one of the little private parlors of Jake's hotel, enjoying their cigars.

"It is really true," Manchester began; "these fellers do intend to raise an army and try to jump the Golden Elephant mine."

"If they had any sense they ought to know, after making a single examination of the mine, that any attack upon it would be followed by a fearful amount of bloodshed."

"Yes, but that fact don't count, for they are not going to be the ones to attack the mine."

"That is true, it is the tools that will suffer."

"It would be just pie for a lot of worthless fellows to agree to accept four or five dollars a day and their feed; but when it comes to facing the music of Winchester rifles at short range they will not be in it."

"Well, now, Gordon, I want to ask you," and Manchester arose as he spoke and commenced pacing up and down the room, "what evil fortune is it that attends this Golden Elephant mine? From the time the claim was struck it has been one perpetual source of dispute and bloodshed. Does fatality mark the mine?"

"It really looks like it," Gordon answered, thoughtfully, "and, too," he added, "it really looks as if there was a curse not only about the mine, but about the town so far as I am concerned, for when I first struck it fight was in the air. It seemed as if every third man wanted to tackle me, and it was a long time before things seemed to get down to a normal condition."

"Gordon, I am going to hold on to this

mine until I get my money out of it," Manchester declared, with grave determination, stopping suddenly in front of the sport. "I will raise an army of five good men, and I want you to head it."

"Well, I don't know as I've got any objection. I will be high priced, you know!"

"I want all high-priced men, each and every one, whom I know I can depend upon."

"I can get them—men who are better worth ten dollars a day than ordinary men are worth two," the sport averred.

"I don't suppose, Harry, you quite understand the way I feel about this thing. I am not superstitious, but it is my belief that there is a fatality attached to the mine which brings bloodshed, and I'm going to get quit of the property if I can get my money back."

"Let these fellows put up twenty-five thousand dollars cash, or good property that I can turn into cash, and they can make a trade with me. That will be the easiest way for them to get the Golden Elephant mine."

CHAPTER XXXV.

PLAYING POSSUM.

The night came on which Harry Gordon had resolved to promulgate the report of his death. He had arranged with Jake, the hotel-keeper, to fix the job up in good shape, while he, disguised as a miner, waited at the concert hall.

He had had no trouble in identifying Daisy Murdoch as having been connected with some past event of his life, but as she evidently had been carefully disguised at that time, it was not possible for him to come right down to the particulars.

At about eleven o'clock a half a dozen fellows came up the main street, talking very loudly, and making considerable noise.

People hastened to learn what was the trouble, when it was proclaimed that the champion of champions was dead.

He had been assassinated by some rascals who had fired at him from the dark, attacking him from the rear, and not giving him any chance for his life.

Great was the discussion which this news provoked—great the number of drinks ordered, and great the speculation as to what would be the fortunes of the Golden Elephant mine, now that the dare-devil sport was out of the way.

Proceeding on the scheme he had formed, Gordon paid his attention to the bars and the drinkers. He would there be able, he decided, to spot the rogues who he was sure were at the bottom of all the deviltry.

After a while an under-sized, mean-looking young man, dressed like a miner, came into the concert hall, and in a few minutes the sport made up his mind that this was the song and dance woman, Daisy Murdoch, in disguise.

"This is the boss who has been trying to have me killed; but she won't have to pay out any cash to-night, for each one of her gang is making tracks from Sulphur Bar as though Satan was after them all."

The disguised woman played her part with rare judgment, and the sport came to the conclusion that he could not have had a much more dangerous foe.

"It has been a rare piece of luck for me to come out ahead, but, although I have baffled every blow yet, I don't see any opportunity for me to get in a lick at her."

"I can't prove that she hired these fellows to kill me. That is not possible; so my best chance is to go back and try and get evidence from the old time."

Gordon took his way to the hotel, much disappointed at the result of his night's work, but decided to hold a council of war at once with the German and his wife.

Hoffman was just closing up his establishment as the sport came in.

As the three usually took their beer together before retiring to rest, when they were seated at the table, Gordon explained the particulars of the affair.

"No good to fool round mit the concert hall," Jake decided. "Go for the saloon; make a beating place mit it; spend your

money there; get them to look upon you as a regular customer, and then the chances are that you may pick up some information."

"That was the plan of action that I had decided on," Gordon remarked.

"It is a difficult case, seeing that the lapse of years has dulled your memory," Mrs. Hoffman observed.

"I got Sandy Jones to look into the affair, with the idea that he might be able to discover something," Gordon informed them.

"Oh, no!" Hoffman protested; "d'ot Jones chap was not d'e man for such business at all. Efferybody knows him, und he would not be able to do you any good; but d'ot leedle game v'at I put up mit you vill work, I think."

The following day Gordon had plenty of work to occupy his time in organizing the army which was to defend the Golden Elephant mine.

The appearance of the sport, by the way, at the breakfast table, on that particular day, created the greatest excitement.

The report of his death had spread far and wide, and it had been currently believed.

Owing to the fact that he had assumed the disguise of a tramp, nobody had seen him around town, and consequently all took it for granted that he had really been assassinated.

His reappearance then provoked profound astonishment.

He laughed at the questions put to him in regard to the matter.

"Yes, some rapscallions did try to get a shot at me in the dark, but they did not succeed, and I don't think any of them will ever try it again."

The sport remained in the office of the Golden Elephant mine and the applicants for admission to the army came to him there.

He was very particular as to his choice, but by three o'clock he had secured his force.

Then he returned to the hotel, where he remained until after supper.

At eight o'clock he again donned his tramp's disguise, secured to his person a complete arsenal of weapons, and started for the saloon, where he found Sandy Jones waiting for him.

Together they made the rounds, and the heart of the tramp gave a great jump when down in an obscure corner he saw, seated at a table, a well-dressed miner with a long dark beard and a woman with a long veil—the very game he sought!

The man was called Hugo Clark. Twelve years before he had been employed in a big commission house in Denver, and the woman, also, had been in the same establishment.

Strange to say, Gordon at once recognized her now, cloaked and veiled though she was, when he had failed to identify her in the disguise of Daisy Murdoch.

Immediately a lively episode came to the sport's memory; he had caught the woman and her husband and Clark robbing the safe of the commission house red-handed.

All three attacked him with the ferocity of tigers. Murdoch he had killed outright; then he supposedly received his own death wound, and it was, in truth, many a day before he was himself again.

Two other clerks who had rushed in had been killed in the fight.

There were the two much wanted criminals.

Gordon made his way to the street.

"Here's a chance for me to square that old account, and also the new one which she has been endeavoring to run up," and away he hurried to hunt up the chief of police, but first proceeding to the hotel to resume his normal garb.

As the "chief" was one of those who delighted to turn night into day, there was no trouble in finding him.

The warrants were procured, the deputies summoned, and, just about midnight, the party advanced on their prey.

They slipped in quietly, one by one, so as not to excite any attention.

The sport came around, in a quiet way, and the first indication the desperado had

of his presence was Gordon's exclamation:

"It's a good many years, Hugo Clark, but the crime lies at your door all the same."

The man looked up in amazement, to find himself covered by the weapon of the sport.

Then the chief got in his fine work and in a twinkling handcuffed the man and woman together. Then he hurried them to the door, getting them out of the place before one-twentieth of the people in it knew what had occurred.

The moment he got them into the open air he fairly ran them around the house to the back door, and in at that portal.

It is a risky thing to arrest a woman in a Western saloon after nine o'clock at night, no matter what she has done, for there are always plenty of men with just enough liquor on board to want to interfere.

The woman was desperate, too; and when she found herself back in the house she manifested an intention of raising an alarm.

The chief clapped his little short revolver to her ear.

"Utter a single sound and it will be the last that you will ever give out in this world."

The woman was cowed by the threat. "For Heaven's sake don't fire! I will not speak!"

"You are wise," the chief said.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE CHASE BY NIGHT.

Some few of the crowd had followed the chief to the back door of the building, but as there was no light there, no sounds, they came to the conclusion that they had made a mistake, and hurried to the front again.

The chief's programme had not worked exactly according to rule, for a covered wagon, with a good two-horse team, was due at the back of the saloon at the same time that he was at the front.

It was only a few minutes late, though, and when it arrived the chief, the captives and the sport got on board and were speedily driven away.

When the wagon neared the hotel it halted to allow the sport to dismount, and then went straight on to the county-seat, where the prisoners were deposited in the jail.

Right here let us add:

Both Clark and the woman were convicted, and received a sentence of twenty years in State's prison, at hard labor.

It did not take long for the sport to get to sleep that night, for he was pretty well tired out, after the many events of the day.

He slept soundly until about three o'clock; then he was suddenly awakened by rude hands seizing him, and he found himself bound hand and foot, and gagged.

Then a light was lit. There were two men in the room, masked, and disguised beyond recognition.

They searched the sport's clothes, and the bed, and the apartment, in the most thorough manner.

A rich haul they secured.

The sport was one of those careless men who carried a great deal of money around him.

Fully five hundred dollars the rascals found, and then left by the window, by means of which, and a short ladder, they had gained entrance to the apartments.

The moment the robbers retreated, Gordon made giant-like efforts to break the bonds which bound him.

This he was not able to do, but, about the first effort, proved too much for the bed, and down it came with a mighty crash, which created almost a panic in that part of the hotel, for it seemed as if half the building was coming down.

This concussion, and the struggle that accompanied it, so loosened the cords on his wrists that Gordon was able to release himself, and by the time the robbers reached their horses, some fifty feet distant, the sport had his head out of the window, yelling, "Stop thief!" lustily.

Just half a dozen yells Gordon gave, so as to post the people around as to what had occurred, and then the alacrity with which he proceeded to get into his clothes was wonderful.

All he took was boots, breeches, shirt and hat, with his holster of weapons, and dropping from the window to the ground, he ran to the corral, got his broncho, which was an unusually speedy little horse, and soon was following in the chase.

Unfortunately for the robbers, it was a bright night.

Objects for a considerable distance could plainly be discerned, and so they were not able to take refuge in the darkness.

Pursuit had followed so quickly that the thief-takers were on the track of the fugitives before they had gone half a mile.

"This is the toughest kind of luck," the big robber observed, as he glanced over his shoulder, upon reaching the foot-hills. "After collaring the stuff so beautifully, to have to ride away with half the town yelping at our heels like a lot of curs, is just beastly luck."

The thieves rode straight on, and having extra good horses, had the satisfaction, at the end of an hour, of seeing that they had drawn well away from the bulk of their pursuers, less than ten of whom were at that time sticking tightly to the trail.

In another half hour it was safe to say that not more than three or four would be in the pursuing force, but four good men they would be.

A distance of only about a quarter of a mile now separated the parties, and a broken country, with a hard, steady, constant rise in it, confronted them.

The fugitives shook their heads. Their horses were beginning to play out, and it was certain they could not go more than a mile farther.

"I tell you what it is, pard, we are in for it. We've got to stop and fight this gang, for we can't run away from them; so let's turn into this clump of evergreens. It is big enough to cover both our beasts and ourselves."

"That is a good idea."

The two headed for the trees, and in five minutes disappeared.

"Hello!" exclaimed Gordon, as he noted the disappearance; "we have run our men to earth! Now we've got them. We'll just picket that piece of timber and when light comes we'll fight them."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HUNTED DOWN.

That picketing was done so thoroughly that when morning came it found the game and the hunters on the alert, within calling distance of each other, yet just out of pistol range.

"How do you find yourselves after your night's ride?" Gordon called out, as the big robber put in an appearance, as if to parley.

"Well, I'm rather stiff and sore, for a fact."

"What is your programme?" the chief robber asked. "Do you expect to get us no matter what the cost?"

"Well, now that we have run you to earth, we certainly don't intend to let you go," Gordon declared.

"We occupy a strong position, here," the chief robber announced, "and you can't dislodge us without losing some lives."

"Oh, not at all. We shall just wait for reinforcements with Winchesters; then we'll bag you, dead or alive, just as you wish," Gordon assured, confidently.

That of course decided it. There would be no use standing out against Winchester. The all-around sport had got in his work again.

"We might as well chuck the thing up now as later on; the scheme is a complete failure. We've got the cash, but they've got us," muttered the big ruffian; then turning to his companion, he asked, "does she go?"

"Oh, yes; it is no use when you run up against a stone wall to try and kick a way through it. Just you let them know

how we feel about the matter," the little rascal added, "for I'm anxious to get out of this as soon as I can."

The chief robber, whose name was Bill Shepard, stepped from the evergreens and waved a white handkerchief, whereat Gordon answered by a like signal.

"I reckon, Mr. Gordon, that we will have to surrender. You've got the bulge on us, so we owns up beat."

"You are quite correct about that," the sport replied; "we've got a dead pull on you."

It did not take many minutes to arrange the matter, and the surrender was made.

Gordon got back his money, intact, just as the robbers had seized it. The rascals were deprived of their weapons, and all were soon mounted, and rode away for Sulphur Bar.

Once there the ruffians were placed in charge of the chief of police, who at once put them "in durance vile."

It was short durance vile, however, in that local lock-up, for both men were quickly convicted, and got five years each in the State's prison.

The sport's admirers were now so numerous that they really made life irksome to him, so he took refuge in the office of the Golden Elephant in sheer self-defense.

Once within the "works," Manchester informed the commander of his army:

"They have succeeded in engaging all their forces for attacking us, and may put in an appearance at any moment."

"Then it is time for me to take command of my forces, I suppose," observed Gordon, in a matter-of-fact way.

Returning to the Bar the Gold-Button Sport quickly gave the signal to Sandy to gather his recruits and when the commander-in-chief, an hour later, put in an appearance at the mouth of the gulch he was received by a delighted force.

"They have been skirmishing in the neighborhood already, captain," one of the men, Steve O'Brien by name, and Sandy Jones's particular friend, remarked.

O'Brien had "enlisted for the campaign," and was easily the best man the sport had.

"Not anywhere near at hand, you understand, captain, but a couple of miles out."

"Well, Stephen, we'll just keep our good eyes wide open and not let them come any sharp dodge on us here at the gulch mouth," announced the leader.

"You just bet your moccasins we'll do that same!" was the plucky fellow's assurance.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE ENEMY DISPLAY THEIR FORCES.

Both Gordon and O'Brien being equipped with excellent field-glasses, they commanded a complete view of the surrounding country.

"Do you notice that dark clump of timber about three miles off?" asked Steve.

The sport nodded.

"That is where the enemy have their camp, and take me for a wolverene if they ain't coming out now, in all the full attitude of war."

"Is that possible, and Gordon glanced through his glass.

"By Jove, you are correct! They are marching along the slope."

"Can it be possible they mean to venture an attack in broad daylight?" O'Brien asked.

Gordon was watching them intently through the glass.

"By Jove! O'Brien, they do intend to pay us a visit!" the sport announced.

The alarm was at once given, and soon the ten recruits, with the sport at their head, were posted at the mouth of the gulch.

The approaching force came steadily on.

"These fellows must be crazy," Gordon observed. "Why, if they intend to try a game of this kind we can pick them off one by one without the least trouble. They are now within range, but I don't want to slaughter them in cold blood."

Gordon tied his handkerchief to the muzzle of his Winchester rifle and rose from the rifle-pit.

"Halt there!" he cried. "You are within range, and if you advance a single step

farther we will open fire on you. We shall shoot to kill!"

The "enemy" retreated at once, in ludicrous disorder, greatly to the amusement of the defenders.

"A nice set of galoots to send out to fight for a mine," said Steve, with supreme contempt.

For the next half hour the scene was entertaining.

The attackers, now under cover, popped away at intervals, but what on earth they were banging at no one could say.

"What the deuce do they mean by giving battle after this fashion?" the sport finally exclaimed.

"Upon my life, I can't understand," O'Brien observed.

Then, to the surprise of the Golden Elephant men, the assailants retired from the field, marching along the side of the hill toward their camp.

The sport and O'Brien looked at each other in amazement.

Then the latter said:

"There must be some trick about this matter. Jack La Mothe is not much of a leader, but he surely knows better than to make such a perfect fool of himself."

"Yes, I should imagine so," the sport replied. "The only thing we can do is to keep quiet and wait for them to develop their plans."

That night was too dark for the besiegers to risk an attack, and both the enemies slept in peace and quiet, leaving the thunders of war to another day.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

OUR FRIEND THE ENGLISHMAN.

But now to recur to one of the early personages of this veracious story—Lord John Thomas, the Englishman, who had cut quite a figure around town, having letters of introduction to various prominent parties.

With Jefferson Parker and Jack La Mothe he was particularly intimate—in fact, he had come to Sulphur Bar expressly to see them, and, it may now be said, was the "syndicate" who was trying to jump the Golden Elephant mine.

La Mothe and Parker, happening to meet him at Virgin City, had represented what a splendid chance there was for a speculation, so the Briton had been snared, and agreed to put up fifteen thousand dollars, which he promptly did, seven thousand in cash and eight thousand more in thirty days.

This done, the preparations for war took shape and progressed up to the time now under consideration.

"Well, how goes everything, don't you know?" asked the investor, as he entered the office where Jefferson Parker and Jack La Mothe sat in consultation.

"Very nicely indeed," Parker suavely assured; "help yourself to a chair, my dear fellow, and a cigar?"

"Thanks, awfully, don't care if I do," Lord John replied, as he helped himself to a weed and then tilted back in an office chair.

"We commenced operations yesterday," Parker explained. "The men are on the spot, and drilling has commenced."

"And the boys take very well to it, too," Jack La Mothe added.

"But I say, my dear fellows," averred the Englishman, "you are working this game in a blasted queer way, don't you know? I thought you intended to jump this property—that is, to jump upon and seize it unawares, when the other fellows weren't expecting the jump, and so couldn't show fight."

Parker and La Mothe both shook their heads.

"You couldn't work an attack of that kind in this case," Parker assured. "The mine is too strongly fortified for that, so our plan is to take it by a trick, just the same."

"Ah, yes, I see, my dear boy," the Englishman seemed to acquiesce, but he looked decidedly puzzled.

"Suppose we get horses, ride down and examine the ground; then you can see just what is going on."

"That's a jolly good idea, don't you know?" John Thomas thought.

At this Jack La Mothe arose. "You wait here, and I'll bring the horses around in short order," and off he went.

In ten minutes Jack was at the door with the animals, and all three were riding along the lower part of the gigantic hill which stretched in such an easy trend to that strange rift in the face of nature in which the Golden Elephant property was situated.

In due time the camp up in the range was reached, and the Englishman was received with all honors by the "army," which was just sitting down to the noon-day meal. The Englishman was invited to join in the "feed," which proved to be a beef stew in frontier style, with plenty of coffee.

After the meal cigars were produced, and the Englishman announced that, to his thinking, this was about as jolly a picnic, don't you know? as he had assisted at in some time.

At two o'clock the "army" was mustered and, led by Captain Jack La Mothe, proceeded to go through exactly the same performance which they had on the previous day.

The Golden Elephant men were so disgusted with this procedure that they did not deign to fire a shot in return.

"Those fellows up there don't seem to think much of your men down here," Lord John remarked, astonished at the indifference shown by the defenders.

"They don't understand what we are up to, and so are puzzled. This is all part of our little game to win the fight without much bloodshed."

"We will fool them with this sort of business for four or five days, and then, when they least expect it, try a trick which will hoist them completely out of the mine."

"By Jove! that will be jolly, now, won't it, don't you know? What is the nature of the operation?"

"Really, I'd be delighted to tell you all the particulars, my lord, but I am sworn to secrecy, and so am not able to do so. In two or three days you will know all about it, though."

The easy-going Briton was perfectly content with this assurance, so he marched back with the "troops" to the camp, had an impromptu supper there with them; then, with Jefferson Parker and Jack La Mothe, returned to Sulphur Bar.

Of course this sort of thing down at the Golden Elephant gulch could not go on without the people of the Bar being aware of it.

Their mystification was great, but Parker and Jack simply laughed at their questions and made no explanation.

CHAPTER XL.

A LITTLE UNEASY.

Lord John Thomas had had a bad night. He had not been able to find a single person who was a good poker-player.

The Englishman did not play for the sake of winning money, but because he enjoyed the beauties of the game.

And when it came to sitting down and playing for hours with men who could not play, it was simply disgusting.

The lord worried it out until twelve o'clock, then he went to bed.

Another thing, too, which contributed to Lord Thomas's annoyance—his man-servant, John Smith, was absent. The lord and John were like two inseparables—wherever you found one you might be sure the other was not far off.

There had been some trouble about his luggage, and he was obliged to send Smith back to attend to it.

"Thank goodness! he'll be here for lunch, though," Lord Thomas observed, as he walked down the street to the office of Jefferson Parker.

He stepped into the Express office on the way and got a parcel.

The eyes of both Parker and La Mothe glistened when they noticed the package.

"Now we can settle this affair right up," Lord John Thomas observed.

"There is eight thousand cash due on the shares, and here it is."

The money was counted, and the se-

curities made over in the regular fashion, then Captain Jack La Mothe suggested that they take a drink or two to celebrate the completion of the enterprise.

When the three lined up against the bar the Englishman, who was decidedly out of sorts, observed:

"This is, of course, the completion of our partnership, but not of the enterprise. That will not be completed until we have possession of the deuced mine, don't you know?"

"Don't you worry yourself about that in the least," Jefferson Parker observed, tapping the Englishman familiarly on the back.

"Two days more gives us the mine, the richest bit of ore for a thousand miles."

"Well, I certainly hope so, my dear boy."

"Two days, remember; only two days; that is not long to wait, particularly when a man knows that, at the end of that time, he will have an enormous fortune in his grasp."

Parker had a very plausible way with him, and so succeeded in satisfying the Englishman.

They had another bottle of ale, and then parted, Lord Thomas proceeding to his hotel.

In front of it he encountered John Smith just getting out of the stage coach.

Great was the delight of the Englishman.

"Hi, you! You ought to have been back here a couple of days ago!" Lord Thomas exclaimed.

"Couldn't help it, me lu'd. They got away with the blasted luggage, and I 'ad awful work to get hit," the man explained.

He was a short, stocky little Englishman, with short-cut, red hair, and red side whiskers.

"Come up-stairs to the room. I'm afraid I've got myself into a fearful hole."

"Oh, well, well! Nothing can be so bad that it can't be worse, me lu'd," John Smith remarked, as he followed his master up the stairs.

Lord Thomas rang for beer and tobacco immediately.

To illustrate the peculiar relations existing between these two men, we shall have to give a few words of explanation.

The two had been master and man for thirty years. The lu'd had the utmost faith in the judgment of the valet—in fact, as a rule, more faith in his judgment than in his own.

"Now, then, you know about this Golden Elephant business?"

"Yes, me lu'd, and I thought it would turn out to be a good hinvestment."

"I have just paid over the last cash, but I paid it against my better judgment, don't you know?"

"Well, 'ow is that, me lu'd?"

"They are not carrying out the scheme the way they started in."

Lord Thomas then explained the change which had been made.

"Oh, no, that was not according to Gunter at all, me lu'd."

My lord then told about the drilling of the "troops."

"I don't like the looks of that sort of thing at all. It appears to me like a 'plant,' the valet declared, with a shake of the head.

"We'll get horses and take a look at the blooming thing," Lord Thomas decided.

"The chances are a thousand to one that in ten minutes' time you will be able to discover whether it's a game to do me out of my money or not."

An hour later and the pair gazed up the long green hill at the well-fortified cleft.

"It's a plant, me lu'd," the valet exclaimed, in deep disgust. "No army of men could take that box, if the men inside were on the alert, don't you know?"

"But they don't intend to attack it from this quarter. This here business is just to keep them occupied while the real attack comes over the top of the big hills."

While Lord Thomas was a well-informed man in regard to ordinary matters, yet when it came to soldiering he knew absolutely nothing.

"Bosh!" exclaimed the valet. "It would take an army with balloons, don't you know? to do anything of that kind. I'm afraid that you are done out of your cash, me lu'd."

"Oh, well, that's only a flea-bite, and I think it will not keep us from getting home to England, don't you know?"

The two then rode off.

"I'm astonished that Parker should play such a game on me, for we have had many a deal together which has turned out profitably to both of us."

"Well, me lu'd, when a big temptation comes in a man's way sometimes he can't resist it."

"That's very true, John Smith."

The Englishman rode on for a good half-hour in silence.

It was evident that he had been hard hit, and did not like it.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, suddenly, "do you know that I'm not going to submit to be robbed in this barehanded way? I never struck anything like this in America in all my life; no, sir! I will hunt these fellows up and demand an immediate explanation."

"I would, me lu'd. That is the only way to act in a case of this kind. By George, me lu'd, the 'ole thing is hout-rageous from beginning to end, and the honly way to do is to put the screws on as soon as possible."

"You can depend upon my doing so, John Smith."

The two men rode direct to Jefferson Parker's office, but found no one in.

The office did not have an office boy, so there was nobody to give information.

John Smith inquired of the neighbors on both sides of the way, but no intelligence could be gained.

Then Lord John Thomas went to the bank where he knew Parker had done business.

Everything was all right there as far as the bank people knew. He still kept his account there, with a small balance in his favor.

"He has probably been called from his office on business, and you'll find him there on your return."

"Oh, no, I won't find him, don't you know? He is a blasted rascal, and he has absquatulated, as you Americans say, with fifteen thousand dollars of my cash, and when you come to look into his record, it is my opinion you will find that both Jefferson Parker and Captain Jack La Mothe have gone to eternal smash."

It did not take long for this report to circulate about town, and it did not take long either for the keen Sulphur Barites to discover that the two men had indeed been speculating wildly during the past three months.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE ENGLISHMAN IS ROUSED.

Jefferson Parker and Jack La Mothe were both broke, and they had seized upon the chance to possess themselves of Lord John Thomas's fifteen thousand dollars.

A couple of thousand dollars paid for the "army" business and other incidentals, which gave them a chance to get away with thirteen thousand dollars clean cash.

The Englishman became more and more enraged as time passed.

"By Jove! Those fellows have not got so much the start. I wonder if it wouldn't be possible to hunt them down?"

John Smith meditated for a moment.

"I do not see any reason why we can't do it, me lu'd, provided we spend plenty of money."

"Money doesn't come into the question at all," the Englishman declared. "Let us go to the stables at once." And to the stables the two hurried.

The proprietor, a genial man, received the Englishman with politeness.

"Oh, yes; Mr. Parker kept his horses here, but they went out, I think, at nine this morning."

"Have you heard that Parker has turned out to be a bad egg, don't you know?"

"Yes, it doesn't take long for the gossip of the town to get around, and I'm sorry for it, too, for he has done business

with me for a couple of years, and we have always got on nicely together."

"Under those circumstances, then, it is natural for you to speak well of him, but, I'm hot with rage, don't you know? on account of the way he's got away with my little cash, and I don't propose to submit to be robbed in this way, either, without making an attempt to revenge myself."

"That is natural," the stable-keeper remarked.

"I'm going to give pursuit."

The other shook his head.

"I'm afraid he has got so great a start that it will not be possible for you to accomplish anything."

"You see, their game will be to drive in an indirect way to some railroad station, dispose of their team there, and take the train, and the iron horse will soon carry them beyond reach."

"How about the wire?" Lord John Thomas suggested. "You must remember, my dear fellow, that the telegraph beats the railroad all hollow, as you Americans put it."

"That's true, enough. But have you taken into consideration the fact that they have over six hours' start—yes, over ten, and if they have used the time to good advantage, and the chances are a hundred to one that old sharps like these two men haven't made any mistake about it, they are now far beyond your reach."

"By Jove, I'll have a try for it, anyway," the Englishman declared.

"I'll get a team and drive to the nearest railroad station. It may be possible that with their confidence in their great start, they will go straight on ahead, don't you know?"

"All right, sir. I'll give you the best the stable affords," and he hurried away to execute his commission.

"I'll give this bull-headed Englishman exactly what he calls for, but he don't stand one chance in a hundred to win a game in playing against such men as Jefferson Parker and Jack La Mothe."

He had ordered the team sent to the hotel, and when it arrived there the Englishman proceeded to pack it with a choice selection of firearms.

From Hoffman he had procured the route and the necessary information.

Honest Jake had not hesitated to tell him that he was going on a wild-geese chase of wide dimensions.

"You are going to the nearest station. How do you know they go there? You cannot tell anything about it."

"I have lived in Sulphur Bar for a number of years, and have known both those men. They are sharps, and you do not stand a chance to catch them."

But the Englishman went ahead just the same.

In due time master and man reached the railroad station.

About everybody there knew Jefferson Parker and Jack La Mothe, and were very much surprised to learn that they had gone to smash.

"But, had anybody seen the two men recently?"

"No; not for a month."

"They hadn't taken a train that morning?"

"Oh, no; nor for a week previous."

Being thus baffled, Lord John and his man mounted their wagon and started on their return trip.

"I'm afraid the fellows have planned the game too shrewdly for me."

CHAPTER XLII.

A GOOD MAN.

The Englishman drove up to the hotel with a look of extreme disgust upon his face.

"Aha! my dear friend, you did not get him," the landlord exclaimed.

"No; both the men were well out of the way, and there is no certainty, either, that they went that way."

"Did I not tell you that before you started? But you were determined to have your own way."

"Yes, yes; I will have to admit that I was headstrong, don't you know? I was so anxious to catch the fellows that I did not care how much money it cost."

"Hello, hello! that is mighty bold talk," said a tall, wiry-looking man of forty-five or thereabouts, who leaned against a pillar of the porch picking his teeth with a straw. He was dressed in a commonplace walking-suit, smoothly shaven, but had that peculiar look about him which seemed to say that he was used to the stirring adventures of flood and field in the far Western mountain region.

"But I mean it, every word of it, don't you know? my dear fellow. There's a couple of men who have got away with thousands of my dollars, and I'm anxious to hunt them down so as to get some satisfaction out of them."

"Well, I don't blame you."

"And I'm willing to throw some good money after bad to accomplish the capture of the pair."

"There's a chance that it can be done, but not in the way in which you were going to work."

The Englishman took a good look at the speaker. There was something about the man which indicated that he knew what he was talking about.

"I have had some experience in this sort of thing," the stranger continued, "and so don't go into it like a greenhorn."

"But I'd better introduce myself, so you'll know something about me."

"My name is William Jackson, but out on the frontier hyar among the boyees I've got the name of Hickory Bill Jackson, or, more commonly, Hickory Bill."

"I can recommend Mr. Jackson as being a first-class mountain man, a shot who has killed more Indians and bad men than he has fingers and toes," the landlord affirmed.

"I am delighted to meet Mr. Jackson, don't you know?" and the Englishman shook hands warmly.

And there was nothing dishonest in this declaration either, for Lord John Thomas had a high admiration for all such peculiarities.

"Now, then, my lord, the only way to capture birds like these is to chase them after their own fashion."

"The double team was a blind. It was abandoned a few miles out—then saddle horses were taken."

"Ah, yes, of course, I see!" Lord John exclaimed.

"A trick of that sort would completely throw the pursuers off the track."

"So you see, my lord, the only way to chase these fellows is to go on horseback."

"Will you come with me?" Lord John Thomas asked, abruptly. "You shall have your own terms and take complete command of the party."

"Yes, I will go with you; and, as to terms, I reckon we won't quarrel with regard to them; but we require four good horses and the proper weapons and ammunition, though I reckon we're all fixed, as far as that goes."

"Now, mind ye, my lord, I don't guarantee to capture these fellows, or even to get on their track, for they may have laid out so good a flight that the smartest tracker couldn't trail 'em."

"Do your best; that's all I ask of any man," Lord John declared.

Old Hickory at once set to work. He mounted his horse and made a wide circle around Sulphur Bar, commencing at about a ten-mile circle and increasing.

He found where the pair had abandoned the wagon and taken horses, and then sold the horses at the railroad station and taken the train.

Hickory Bill returned and made his report.

"We'll give it up as a bad job," said the Englishman. "Come and have a drink with me."

CHAPTER XLIII.

A GREAT CONVULSION OF NATURE.

It is now five days since Jack La Mothe made his appearance with his troops in the neighborhood of the Golden Elephant mine.

It was about one o'clock in the afternoon; the Golden Elephant people had got through with the noon-day meal, and were now hard at work in the mine again.

Gordon and O'Brien sat at the edge of the gulch in one of the rifle-plts.

"Do you know, O'Brien, that the longer this keeps on the more disgusted I become?" the sport declared.

"I don't blame you. There is nothing particularly pleasant in sitting up here and watching this fellow drill his troops two or three miles off."

"If I didn't give Jack La Mothe credit for being a great deal smarter than I really think he is, I would soon put a stop to this bird's-egging."

"How would you do it?" O'Brien asked.

"By pitching into him. I would rush my men down the hill and at him in a style that would be apt to astonish the weak nerves of himself and his fighting men."

"I've perfect confidence, you know, that eight or ten of my men here can thrash his entire force."

"I agree with you there, for his men seem to me to be nothing but mere trash."

"That's the opinion I have of them, but the deuce of the thing is that this may be all a trick, designed to get me away from the mine, and he's got a good-sized body of horsemen concealed somewhere ready to make a dash on the fortifications the moment I am out of the way."

"Yes, there might be danger of his putting up a job of that kind."

"It will not do, you know, to allow the enemy to get in between me and my headquarters."

"No; although you could wheel around and take them in the rear."

"Yes, but a strong body would be apt to make it decidedly uncomfortable for me."

Just at this moment the "army" of Jack La Mothe made its appearance, marching along the hillside.

The sport and O'Brien watched them in silence, until they came to their accustomed drilling spot, right opposite the Golden Elephant mine.

They were down a hill, so to speak, but the ascent of the hill was a very gradual one.

The Gold-Button Sport watched the enemy go through their movements for about ten minutes, and then, smiting his right hand smartly upon his thigh, he cried:

"By Jove! I will take a whirl into those chaps just for fun; and if any mounted force attempts to cut me off from the mine, I will go bail that I'll make it more lively for them than they do for me."

"I will stop work in the mine and put the workmen, well armed, in charge of the well; they will be able to hold it against any ordinary attacking force until I get back, if this is a snare."

In the gulch Gordon made his defenses as secure as possible; then he assembled his ten aids.

"Boys, I'm getting a little tired of this monkey business, on the part of the other fellows down the hill there. They come out, march up and down, apparently all ready for a fight, and then, the first thing you know, they march off."

"Now, it's possible this performance may be a trick to get me to attack them and leave the mine unguarded."

"I reckon, from the way you've got the thing protected, that a hundred men couldn't do much," O'Brien observed.

"Well, I am going to be just green enough to go for those fellows and drive them out of this section of the country."

The news was unexpected, but not at all unwelcome, and the men answered with a yell—a yell so loud and strong that it traveled clear across the country and reached the ears of the jumpers.

They looked up the hill in surprise, but as the Golden Elephant men were up in the gulch, they were concealed from view.

Not for long, though, for the sport, having seen that all was in readiness, led them forth, crossed the trail, he at the head, on the right, and then, with their Winchesters ready, they began the descent of the hill.

The men at the bottom were taken completely by surprise.

Jack La Mothe was not present, as he had been called away by business, and would not be at the camp that day.

The second in command had charge of

the operations. He was a red-bearded Irishman, Colonel Michael McCassey by name, who claimed to be a soldier of fortune, and to have served in a dozen different armies.

"Oho! What is the meaning of that?" he exclaimed. "Is it possible the sphalpeens are thinking of coming to attack us?"

The men were resting between two portions of the drill.

"Begob! we'd only make one mouthful of that handful!" and the colonel flourished his saber with a war-like air.

"They are coming right on, colonel," said one of the men, who knew something about fighting.

"Them things in their hands are Winchester rifles, and it won't take 'em long to get within range, so if you mean to fight, colonel, you had better line out your men."

It was evident that the colonel was uneasy; it was plain that nine out of every ten of the men were uneasy, and that, though there were only ten men opposed to their twenty, they had no stomach for a fight.

Suddenly Gordon halted his force; up went the Winchesters, and they took deliberate aim at the twenty men below.

This was enough for Jack La Mothe's army.

They fired a scattering volley of shots without waiting for orders from the Irish colonel.

The sport and his men replied, but they were not yet within range, so no harm was done to either side.

But Jack La Mothe's "army" had gotten enough.

They broke and ran in all directions.

When the attacking "army" took to their heels in the utterly ridiculous manner in which they did, the besieged fired a volley at them and yelled in utter derision.

Word was sent into the mine to the workmen, for all to come out and see the attackers run away.

Every soul in the gulch was gathered on the edge of the road, yelling at the top of their lungs.

Then came a slight convulsive tremor of the earth.

All the Californians knew what that meant. It was an earthquake!

In alarm they dropped to their knees.

When they looked around the Golden Elephant gulch was no more.

The convulsion of nature had closed it up. The man-trap had vanished!

THE END.

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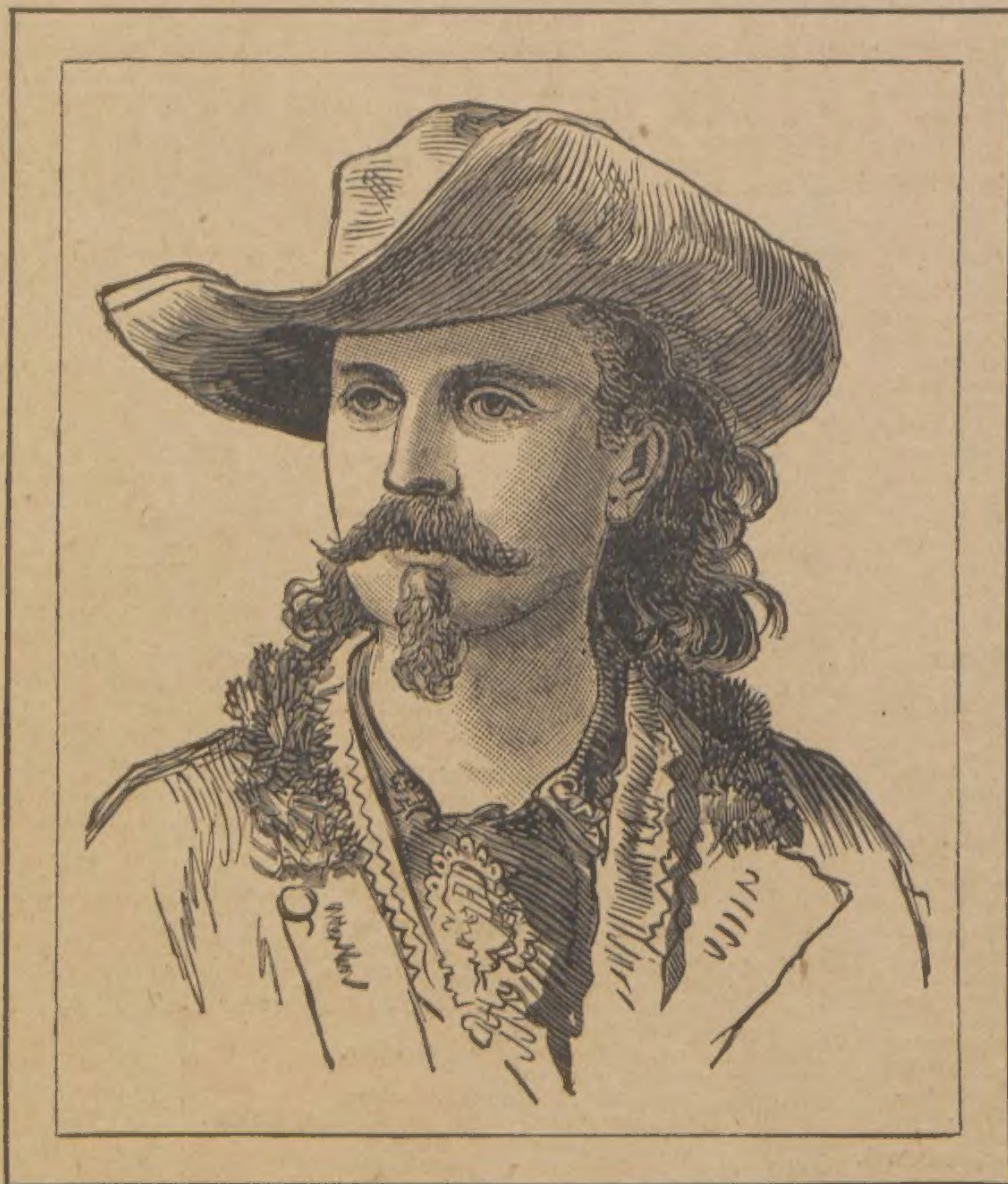
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Buffalo Bill as Hero and Author.



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Buffalo Bill's Wild West Life.

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